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**Jacques Derrida, the Sacred Other and Seventh-day Adventism:
Stumbling on the Creative Play of *Différance* in Genesis 1**

ADRIAN PLATTS

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Supervisor
Professor James R. Cochrane

ABSTRACT

Author: Adrian Platts

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This thesis searches for that which is sacred to Jacques Derrida and ultimately concludes that if anything is sacred to him it is the other. This concern for the sacred is an attempt to ascertain Derrida's relevance and value for religious traditions. Derrida's ideas serve to destabilise (sacred) centres in religious traditions in order to find place for the (excluded) other. Hence, a central theme of this dissertation is that there are no stable centres. I have attempted to demonstrate this in the structure I have followed, a structure that is "centred on" *decentring* ideas that, while not arbitrary, could have been substituted for others: negative theology, the other, detours, *khôra* and *différance*. In order to combat logocentrism with regard to my descriptions of these ideas, I have avoided isolating a central binding logic to govern their interpretation. Instead, I have endeavoured to submit specific Derrida articles to a "fine-grained" examination in an attempt to allow "other" readings to persist.

Khôra is the decentring centre of this dissertation. Taking the idea from Plato's *Timaeus*, Derrida describes *khôra* as the place (without space) and the receptacle (without an inside or outside), that is the condition for everything that is. *Khôra* is neither sensible nor intelligible. It is a third way or third genus (*triton genos*). *Khôra* includes that which logocentrism excludes and since *khôra* is indiscriminately hospitable to all others, the centre cannot be finally determined (even though I have placed *khôra* at the centre) and logocentric ideas are undone.

This interpretive framework is applied to a (sacred) Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) reading of Genesis 1, which states that the days of Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour days. Via the play of *différance*, the dogmatic claims of this centre are challenged while apparently excluded detours (others)—for example, myth, analogy, and science—are brought into the foreground. I further extend this play by substituting the SDA centre of "literal days" with the decentring notion of "without form and void" (Gen. 1:2). This "places" (something like) *khôra* at the centre of not only the *Timaeus* and this dissertation, but also Genesis 1.

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Contents

Introduction	5
1. Searching for the Sacred in Derrida	12
1.1. Religion and the Sacred.....	15
1.1.1. Religion	16
1.1.2. Negative Theology	28
1.1.3. The Sacred.....	36
1.2. The Other	47
1.3. Sacred Centres.....	62
1.3.1. Logocentrism	63
1.3.2. Detours	69
1.3.3. Messianism	86
2. Khôra	97
3. SDA Uses of the Creation Narrative	113
3.1. A Hermeneutical Framework.....	114
3.1.1. Centring the Discourse.....	115
3.1.2. <i>Différance</i>	124
3.1.3. Fundamentals	139
3.2. Without Form and Void	147
3.3. Playing with Genesis 1	160
3.3.1. Seventh-day Adventism: Fundamental Belief #6.....	160
3.3.2. The Profane Other	165
3.3.3. Playing with Science.....	175
Conclusion.....	180
Appendix A: The Triton Genos in the Structure	183
Bibliography.....	185

Introduction

The structure of this dissertation is a major component of its meaning. It is not entirely linear. I will elaborate on this further, but firstly it will be helpful to acknowledge the linear nature of the structure, the normal way one would expect to read any piece of writing: from the first page through to the last page. In this linear sense, the thesis has a movement towards deconstructing a specific understanding of the creation narrative in Genesis 1.

It is pertinent, before continuing, to note that I am writing from within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. This context is of particular relevance and interest to me since I am currently employed by the SDA Church as the lecturer of systematic theology at Helderberg College (Somerset West, South Africa), which is largely responsible for training South African SDA pastors. SDAs have been aligned with, let me say, a conservative evangelical Christianity in that despite very specific distinctive beliefs, they do hold to the notion of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Additionally, however, one of the principal signifiers of SDA identity is the Sabbath and the belief that it should be practiced on the seventh day (Saturday). Part of the reasoning behind this is the apparent connection between the Sabbath and the days of creation in Genesis 1. It is this connection that drives certain sectors within the SDA Church to insist on specific interpretations of Genesis 1.

There is currently a move in the SDA Church to sacralise a very particular reading of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 by centring an inviolable understanding (that is, making it dogma), namely, that the “days” of the creative acts of God in Genesis 1 are six literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days. This logocentrism¹ is considered by its advocates to be stable, inviolate, and sacred. Any attempt to destabilise or question the validity of this centre is not merely to suggest an alternative reading of the text, but is considered to be an attack on the very identity of Adventism.² Because this idea is considered to be sacred to Adventism

¹ I will return to this notion of logocentrism in some detail, but for the moment it is enough to describe it as a pre-understanding that governs the meaning of a text, an idea that one takes to the text to which all further interpretations of the text are subject.

² Occasionally, I use the term “Adventism” as shorthand for “Seventh-day Adventism” acknowledging that in other contexts it could have a broader meaning.

(or, at least, to a hugely influential, possibly majority, faction within Adventism), to *play*³ with it is to profane it, and such profanation could serve as adequate justification for the expulsion of anyone within the Church who might question its validity.

SDA identity is defined in what is known as the fundamental beliefs, currently divided into twenty-eight paragraphs. These beliefs can only be amended at a General Conference (GC) in Session⁴ which occurs once every five years. Currently, the relevant fundamental belief (#6: Creation) has a wording that allows for interpretations that do not necessarily require that the days of Genesis 1 be understood as literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days. Hence, an agenda item which has the intent of effecting a change to this belief, one that will explicitly embody this literalist version, is to be voted at the GC Session in 2015. Currently, then, there is leeway within the SDA Church that allows for other interpretations of Genesis 1, but since this agenda item for 2015 is endorsed by the GC president himself (Ted Wilson), this is no insignificant attempt merely to explain what the SDA Church (apparently) believes with more clarity. It carries an implicit threat towards all SDAs who differ, particularly those in Church employ.

The linear structure of this thesis thus has the intent of invoking certain ideas of Jacques Derrida in order to question this interpretation of Genesis 1. Since this move in Adventism is a sacralising of a particular interpretation of Genesis 1 (it is to be included in the fundamental beliefs of the Church which serve to identify what it means to be an SDA), I seek to determine how Derrida's thought can be applied to ideas of the sacred. After all, if nothing is sacred to Derrida, then it is questionable whether a religion with a direct concern for that which is sacred, would have any use for any of Derrida's ideas. To put this another

³ The idea of "play" is a significant idea for this dissertation, and I am not intending a unique meaning. It has the idea of frivolity, fun and not taking things too seriously, as well as not being strictly governed by inviolable rules. Since it is also used in conjunction with creation narratives (as will become evident as this dissertation unfolds), play is also related to what one might term a creative spirit, a keenness for something novel and different—even boredom with endless repetitions of the same and, hence, expressing an openness to the other. Daniel Migliore, for example, suggests that God's creative "work" is better described as *play*: "We often speak of the creation as the 'work' of God. That way of speaking has its place, but it may connote something routine and mostly unpleasant, which is unfortunately the way work is often experienced in human life. It may be more helpful, therefore, to think of the creation of the world as the 'play' of God, as a kind of free artistic expression whose origin must be sought in God's good pleasure." Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 93.

⁴ The SDA Church has a representative system of governance that is headed by a body known as the General Conference (GC). When the GC is in Session, delegates from SDA congregations elect the various officials that constitute the GC, the principal being the GC President. Various amendments to the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* are also voted. This includes possible changes to the fundamental beliefs.

way, if nothing is sacred to Derrida, then any religion with a concern for the sacred will ultimately be annihilated if it submits to Derrida's hermeneutical theory—and it is not my intent to annihilate Seventh-day Adventism.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, I attempt to identify Derrida's relation to the sacred by: a consideration of Derrida's approach to the sacred within religious traditions (since I am dealing with a religious tradition, Seventh-day Adventism); an examination of “the other”—primarily via Derrida's explication of the phrase *tout autre est tout autre*⁵—(since if anything is sacred to Derrida it is the other, something I will attempt to demonstrate throughout this dissertation); striving to identify what a sacred “centre” might be for Derrida (always remembering that he tends to deflect the centre to the edges in order to bring the periphery into focus). In this opening chapter, I attempt to show that if there is a sacred centre for Derrida, it is not located in the centre. It is elsewhere. It is for this reason that the heart of his work cannot be clearly located and identified. It is described in terms of negation (like negative or apophatic theology). It is a search for the other, something different, and something not yet present. It is not to be found on well-travelled paths, but on seemingly insignificant detours.

With this in mind, it is possible to understand the rationale behind the second chapter of this dissertation, which is an examination of Derrida's invocation of *khôra* drawn from Plato's creation story in the *Timaeus*.⁶ *Khôra* can be described as a place (without space) upon which everything that “is” is inscribed. *Khôra* makes way for both signified and signifier. The two co-exist, words and things.⁷ As Derrida points out, Plato's *Timaeus* is concerned not only with the creation of the sensible and the intelligible, but with the origin and nature of discourse itself. *Khôra* is the epitome of decentring. It has no centre and no periphery. As a “receptacle,” it nevertheless has no inside and no outside. It is a featureless desert with no points of reference. As such it indiscriminately accepts everything and

⁵ This phrase submits to various translations, since it does not have a single stable meaning, but can be loosely translated as “every other is wholly other.”

⁶ For my own reference purposes, I have primarily used Plato, “The *Timaeus*,” in Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966), 21-360; and Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Teddington: Echo Library, 2006).

⁷ This is the case in Genesis 1 where creation is accompanied by and even *preceded* by the word: “And God said, ‘Let there be light’” (Gen. 1:3 [NIV]). To put this another way, there is the creation of things (signified) which by their presence and absence require representation (signifiers). This simultaneously “gives birth” to discourse; or one could say that *khôra* is hospitable to both (things and words about things).

prioritises nothing. This unsettles anything that claims to be the centre—for instance the idea that the days of Genesis 1 are literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days⁸—since a definitive centre on the one hand tends to exclude or push aside that which disagrees, and on the other hand, provides a locus that *khôra* cannot abide. It is out of concern for the other that Derrida is drawn to ideas that decentre. *Khôra* could also be described as an abyss serving as a disjunction at the centre, a bottomless void at the heart of the dissertation, located at the centre, denying that there is a centre.

The final chapter addresses the logocentric notion that insists the days of Genesis 1 are literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days. However, this project is not interested in examining the text of Genesis 1 to suggest a “better” interpretation or identify a “better” centre, even though I will suggest another centre, one that is analogous to *khôra*. This is *not* an exegetical exercise that attempts to discover what the text (Genesis 1) is *really* saying or an attempt to find the *best* reading of the text. Logocentric views seek to control what one can say about a text. In this sense, to approach the text with a prior understanding is to fail to treat the text with the proper respect. However, since Derrida argues that language cannot escape *différance*,⁹ it is inevitable that logocentric views will also differ with themselves.

Once one realises that there is a play of *différance* within language itself, then one also realises that no matter how precisely one defines something, it also says something else. This “something else” comes about because of *différance*. The moment one places a particular linguistic formulation at the centre, one has drawn *différance* with it. *There is a detour* within the apparently restricted terminology that strives to admit no other. It is for this reason that this hermeneutic does not *disagree* with the idea that Genesis 1 consists of six

⁸ The fusing or comparing of ideas in the *Timaeus* and Genesis 1 is not a novel one. For example, Philo in “Questions and Answers on Genesis” examines Genesis 1 with recourse to ideas in the *Timaeus* and suggests that significant parts of Genesis 1 (for example the creation of human beings on day six) are related to the intelligible and not the sensible world. In contrast to the SDA view that the six days of creation are “literal days,” Philo suggests that the six days are not related to a chronological necessity of a six day creation but rather to the “ideal” nature of the number six. “And he [Moses] says that the world was made in six days, not because the Creator stood in need of a length of time but because . . . of all numbers, six is . . . the first perfect one.” Furthermore the events of the first day are related to the idea of creation “which is perceptible only by the intellect, as the account of the first day will show.” Philo, “Book 1: Philo on Creation,” in *The Writings of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria*, trans. C. D. Yonge, <http://ecmarsh.com/crl/philo/book1.htm> (accessed February 22, 2012).

⁹ I use Derrida’s term *différance* without introduction at this point, although some sort of clarification is probably needed. For the moment it is adequate to understand it as meaning that language differs with itself (there is no single meaning) and that meaning is deferred (there is a deferred—future—meaning that differs with the apparent presence of meaning).

literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days. It *agrees*, only more so. It is in this rigorous agreement that stoically clings to this centre that the other, via *différance*, appears and, despite all efforts to hold to the pre-determined centre, displaces the centre. In other words, once one acknowledges that the days of Genesis 1 *can only* be referring to literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days, one stumbles upon *différance* which exposes the days to being something else. In this way the logocentrism is displaced to the periphery as part of the discourse, a possible detour, but certainly not the exclusive truth of the matter. Not only is the apparently stable centre of the “days” of Genesis 1 displaced, but also the very notion of the fundamental belief itself is undone. After all, something fundamental is concerned with finding the ground that establishes, the inviolable root, and yet the play of *différance* is not escaped by merely claiming it is escaped (by calling something fundamental). There is always another way, what I shall refer to (borrowing from Derrida who borrows from Plato) as a *triton genos* (a third type or third genus).¹⁰

This then leads me to the primary element of the structure of this dissertation which is not linear at all. In this non-linear structure, it is important to realise that my goal is to outline a hermeneutic, rather than to challenge logocentric ideas in SDA interpretations of Genesis 1. The debate over interpretations of Genesis 1 within Adventism merely serves as a case study or an example of the hermeneutical method I am attempting to outline. In this sense, since Adventism merely supplies an example, it is also somewhat arbitrary and could have been substituted for any number of other textual analyses, biblical or otherwise.

To understand what I call a structural hermeneutic of the *triton genos* (a phrase that is roughly descriptive), it is necessary to grasp Derrida’s invocation of *khôra*. As I have already noted, *khôra*, in a sense, serves as a precondition for the created order as well as all the significations that arise from this creation. Derrida unpacks *khôra* as the third part (located in the centre) of Plato’s *Timaeus*. Thus, *khôra* is not a part of the created order, sensible or intelligible, but rather is a third genus that has no content of its own and a “receptacle” that embraces everything that “is.” Since *khôra* is not part of creation and precedes all significations that refer to creation, it also precedes language. It is neither a word nor a concept. Thus, the Greek “word” or the designation “*khôra*” is an *appellation* (a way of naming something that cannot be named) that is necessary because of the constraints of language (which use words), even though *khôra* cannot be finally described by language. For

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, “*Khôra*,” in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 89.

this reason Plato's discussion on *khôra* occurs in between the sensible and the intelligible in the flow of the narrative itself. *Khôra* is, therefore, defined *structurally*. The actual structure of the *Timaeus*, in Derrida's analysis, defines *khôra* (to the extent that one can define nothing) over and above any words that are used to describe what *khôra* "is."

It is this explication of meaning in structure that I have followed in this dissertation.¹¹ The whole point of "placing" *khôra* at the centre of the dissertation is in order to decentre the structure. This is, perhaps, my most significant allusion to deconstruction: a structure in deconstruction.¹² *Khôra* has no centre, no landmarks, and no points of reference. At the centre is that which admits everything but identifies with nothing. Every other is accepted, but none is foregrounded. *Khôra* is, therefore, incompatible with logocentrism. This is why placing *khôra* at the centre destabilises any definitive central logic. I have consistently used the idea of Plato's *triton genos* as a hermeneutical device within the structure to persistently search for the other, any other. The structure is, therefore, divided into triplets each of which is organised around a central motif that functions to decentre and deflect: negative theology, the other, detours, *différance* and *khôra*. The reason for this, as I have already indicated, is because if one is to name something as "sacred" to Derrida, it is the other: Not so much the wholly other in the sense of a definitive God, but any other, the other that differs, the other that possibly will appear over the horizon, the other that challenges our current understandings and can be approached on the *via negativa*, in the desert far from the beaten path. If one is to discover the other, then when texts are read, they must be read with precision and care. This is not a slack and careless "anything goes" hermeneutic where specific meanings are not taken seriously.

I am emphasising two "things" that Derrida esteems. The first, as I have already stated, is the other, and the second is the text. A faithfulness to the text means it cannot be bound by our interpretations. John Caputo observes that deconstruction consists "in a fine-grained reading of the text, of the literality and textuality of the text, slowly, scrupulously,

¹¹ See Appendix A.

¹² While deconstruction is obviously present in my dissertation, I have not relied specifically and directly on deconstruction, but rather on other of Derrida's ideas, notably, *khôra*, detours and *différance*. While one could argue that these are the means or tools by which deconstruction occurs, there is nevertheless a *difference*. For instance, I refer to the "play of *différance*" which, while related to deconstruction, is not precisely the same thing. Neither is taking a detour necessarily congruent with deconstruction. However, as I have said, deconstruction is present in the very structure of the dissertation, and the fact that I make reference to *différance* does not mean that deconstruction would not have also provided a workable hermeneutical centre. Part of my dissertation is to indicate how the centres I have chosen *are* substitutable, and could have been other than what they are.

seriously, in releasing the still-stirring forces that ‘philosophy’ and logocentrism strive to contain.”¹³ This leads me to state something else that this dissertation is not. It is *not* an attempt to arrive at some sort of a summary statement about what Derrida is saying, a cover-all piece that distils the essence of Derridean thought into a neat package that can serve as a reliable logocentrism for anyone who wants to understand Derrida. It would be bizarre indeed if I were to spend considerable time discrediting logocentrism only to apply the very concept to Derrida’s work.

It is, therefore, necessary for me to present very careful and thorough readings of very specific texts in order to avoid logocentrism. There is an inevitable generalising and summarising, a centring of the discourse that occurs. I do not think it is wholly possible to avoid this. However, I have endeavoured to follow “a fine-grained reading” of certain of Derrida’s texts “slowly, scrupulously, seriously.” In particular I have followed this pattern for the centres—*khôra*, detours, the other, *différance*, but also for *logocentrism*, hospitality, and decentring. I have selected specific essays and chapters by Derrida and unpacked them line by line. Yes, I have reworded the text and tried to express clarity and cohesion. I have tried to *make sense* of Derrida’s text and to this end have provided considerable explanation. I have also omitted many nuances of the original text. Nevertheless I have endeavoured to follow the contours and detours of these texts in order to let something other persist, even while I draw very particular conclusions. This does not mean that my reading of the text is any better than other readings. The point I wish to emphasise and re-emphasise is that there are *no definitive centres*, certainly not here anyway. And the whole point of decentring is to preserve that which Derrida esteems: the other. There is another way (*triton genos*) and while the other may be concealed, its residence—on *khôra*—should not be denied, deliberately excluded or pushed to the periphery. I use the word “esteem” but I think it carries the same weight that some would give to “sacred.” This is why the central component of my thesis title is “the sacred other.”

¹³ John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 83.

1. Searching for the Sacred in Derrida

To discover what is sacred to Derrida, it is necessary to describe exactly what is meant by the term “sacred.” The word, with its multiple religious affiliations, tends to thrust one into a quagmire of terminology and designations that defy consistent meaning. The word “sacred,” even if one wishes to “avoid” subscribing to Derrida’s notion of *différance*, does not allow for a single definition. Occurrences of the word in Derrida’s corpus are relatively infrequent and it is debatable whether any of these actually refer to that which Derrida himself might view as sacred. Despite this, I want to at least have an *initial* point of departure. By sacred, I mean that which is inviolable. This could further be defined as “secure from profanation or violation” or, possibly, “unassailable.”¹⁴

But even here it is necessary to proceed with caution and distinguish between that which *should not* or *ought not* be violated, from that which *cannot* be violated. Religions have “things,” “ceremonies,” “times,” and so forth, that are considered sacred, and the word “inviolable” is a possible substitution for sacred. Inviolable carries the connotation of purity and virginity. In this sense, inviolable means “sacred, sacrosanct, inviolable” (though not much is learned from using these terms), but also “intact” and hence, “having the hymen unbroken; ‘she was intact, virginal.’”¹⁵ The virgin as an example of the sacred means that it is possible to violate the sacred, in fact the sacred is always in danger of being violated. The notion of blasphemy and profanity in Judaic and Christian traditions perhaps “speaks” to this kind of violation. In this sense, the sacred *could* be profaned, blasphemed or violated, but it *should* not be.

It is prudent for me to take a detour and discuss deconstruction at this point, since the idea of a sacred “thing” remaining “intact” is problematic for deconstruction. The very notion of deconstruction requires a breaking down and a building up, a destruction and reconstruction. If something is subjected to deconstruction, it is scarcely being treated as sacred. It has been violated. *Nothing* is sacred to deconstruction, since its very status as a

¹⁴ *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Sacred,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inviolable?show=0&t=1318075807> (accessed October 7, 2011).

¹⁵ *WordNet Dictionary*, s.v. “Sacred,” <http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Inviolable> (accessed October 8, 2011).

thing makes it deconstructible.¹⁶ With regard to texts and writing, Gayatri Spivak advances the following: “Here is another [‘description of deconstruction’¹⁷]: ‘. . . the task is . . . to *dismantle* [*déconstruire*] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in [the text], not in order to reject or discard them, but to *reinscribe* [emphasis added] them in another way.’”¹⁸ It is true that deconstruction does not mean destruction, but then profanation and violation can also be distinguished from destruction. The sacred by its very nature does not present itself for deconstruction.

My own concern for what Derrida might view as sacred was prompted by a statement made by John D. Caputo in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*:

Deconstruction is a blessing for religion, its positive salvation, keeping it open to constant reinvention, encouraging religion to reread ancient texts in new ways, to reinvent ancient traditions in new contexts. Deconstruction discourages religion from its own worst instincts by holding the feet of religion to the fire of *faith* Deconstruction saves religion from seeing things, from fanaticism and triumphalism. Deconstruction is not the destruction of religion but its reinvention.¹⁹

Since the sacred frequently finds residence in religious traditions—and certainly this is my particular focus—reinventing these traditions may necessitate a re-evaluation of what a tradition considers sacred. But to touch the sacred is to play with that which should not be touched. In fact, Caputo, himself, refers to deconstruction as an “evangelical [Christian] room clearer” which he therefore “sometimes camouflages as ‘radical hermeneutics.’”²⁰ The evangelical trepidation with regard to deconstruction may well be justified. The tradition which I will be examining—Seventh-day Adventism—holds certain “things” to be sacred, e.g. the Sabbath, the Bible, the Sanctuary and others could be named. Because these things

¹⁶ Conversely, one could argue that *everything* is sacred to deconstruction, since its very status as a thing makes it deconstructible—i.e. the object of deconstruction’s attention. The point here, though, is that since deconstruction does not allow things to remain precisely as they are (perceived), but upsets this sameness or stasis, any static sacred understanding is automatically compromised—one might say subject to profanation. Perhaps, with regard to *khôra*, the notion of an openness to, acceptance of or, even, respect for *everything* that “is” could be akin to viewing *everything* as sacred.

¹⁷ The phrase “description of deconstruction” is Spivak’s and appears in her previous sentence.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Edition de Minuit, 1972), 256, quoted in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator’s preface to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), lxxvi.

¹⁹ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 159.

²⁰ John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 25.

are exhibited by their presence and a particular understanding of this presence, they are inevitably available for deconstruction.

Of course, deconstruction is not something that happens from without. It is not something performed by pernicious academics, for example, who, looking on from without, bring a whole new set of ideas that upset the sacred applecart, as it were.

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.²¹

Deconstruction happens simply because the existing structures contain within themselves the trace of their own incoherence or, perhaps, to phrase this less critically, the trace of the other. Although a particular hermeneutic may appear to provide a single “truth,” a careful examination employing this very hermeneutic will reveal that there are “others” that have been excluded. A significant aspect of this thesis is to show how these others can be revealed with regard to Derrida’s notions of *khôra* and *différance*. The point here, though, is that the other may be recognised by some-one outside of the structure, but not because they have added anything extraneous to the structure, rather it is because they are not blinded as are those within who have restricted their sight by a single-minded adherence to the single “truth” they have identified.

The closing phrase of the above quote—“the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work”—brings into question the idea that the very tools that Derrida uses can be identified as “sacred” for Derrida. Is deconstruction, itself, sacred to Jacques Derrida? Tempting as this idea is, it is not especially helpful because deconstruction is something that happens or is intrinsic to something else (that could be regarded as sacred). It is not really a point of reference. Perhaps, it could be argued that what deconstruction cannot touch, or that which deconstruction cannot deconstruct is sacred. Certainly, the product of deconstruction can also be deconstructed. That which has been deconstructed is not immune to deconstruction.

Derrida acknowledges that the desire of deconstruction may itself become a desire to reappropriate the text actively through mastery, to show the text what it “does not know.” And as she deconstructs, all protestations to the contrary, the critic necessarily assumes that she at

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 24.

least, and for the time being, means what she says. Even the declaration of her vulnerability must come, after all, in the controlling language of demonstration and reference. In other words, the critic provisionally forgets that her own text is necessarily self-deconstructed, always already a palimpsest.²²

Even more decisively, Spivak comments: “Deconstruction is a perpetually self-deconstructing movement that is inhabited by difference.”²³ No text is ever *fully* deconstructing or deconstructed.”²⁴ This means that the work of deconstruction is never done. Once deconstructed, the result of deconstruction becomes the subject of deconstruction itself, and so on indefinitely. The implication of this, for any religious tradition, is that one will never be able to deconstruct it to the point of some “sacred remains”—something that remains after deconstruction is “done” which itself cannot be deconstructed. In other words, if one is looking in a particular religious tradition for something that is sacred to deconstruction (that which cannot be deconstructed), one is liable to be disappointed.

1.1. Religion and the Sacred

Before specifically examining the idea of the sacred in Jacques Derrida’s works, it is essential to identify, to some degree, at least, Derrida’s understanding or critique of religion. If the sacred is to be associated with religion (although it is not necessarily so) or is viewed as a subset of the religious, then the relation between the two is not a peripheral issue that can remain unexplored. Derrida’s attitude to organised religions that give themselves a definitive identity is not exactly positive, and there is little doubt that Seventh-day Adventism is both organised and carefully defined. If (traditional) religion itself is problematic to Derrida, then anything sacred within that religion is merely fruit of the bad tree, as it were, and is not secure from violation.

Between these two notions—the religious and the sacred—there is, perhaps, a third way, that is, the *way* of negative theology. This third way, while exposing one to ideas of theology and God, turns out to direct one, not so much towards God (where one may presume that the sacred might be found) but rather texts, interpretations, translations, discourse and

²² Spivak, lxxvii.

²³ The word “difference” is Spivak’s rendering of *différance*—no distinction is intended.

²⁴ Spivak, lxxviii.

“detours, locutions and syntax.”²⁵ In other words, negative theology, for Derrida, is more important for its value as a rhetorical device than its goal of finding God by the way of negation. First, however, I will consider Derrida’s view of religion.

1.1.1. Religion

Religion, wherever it finds concrete expression, is generally problematic for Derrida. Frequently he embraces the word in quotes: “religion.” This occurs notably in the title “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,”²⁶ first published in 1996. In 1994, Rodolphe Gasché, while acknowledging that “the notion of God is essentially . . . intertwined for Derrida with a variety of threads, traces, marks, or indicants,” also noted only three “major texts in which Derrida addresses questions of theology.”²⁷ In 1997, John Caputo suggested a certain “religiosity” in his title *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*,²⁸ but had removed the quotation marks. Acknowledging that Caputo is quoting Derrida,²⁹ the subtitle could have been (perhaps more logically) encased in quotation marks, possibly “*Religion without Religion*” or even, *Religion without “Religion”* (other derivatives could obviously be suggested)—the quotation marks, of course, always implying that to associate Derrida with religion is possibly an absurdity (something that is already evident or, at least, implied in the phrase “religion without religion”). Although, one should be cautious of even claiming this much, as

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, “*Différance*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, trans. Samuel Weber (New York: Routledge, 2002), 40-101.

²⁷ Rodolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 151. These texts are, as cited by Gasché: Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-153; Jacques Derrida, “On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy,” in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant*, ed. P. Fenves, trans. J. Leavey (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 117-171; Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budich and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3-70.

²⁸ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, 2nd ed., trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 50. I explore this idea of “religion without religion” a little later, but would like to note, for the moment, that the manner in which Derrida uses the phrase does not present itself as particularly self-referential.

Kevin Hart notes: “It is as though Derrida has realized that the word ‘religion’ must be held with pincers, or as though the word has just realized that Derrida has taken it up and so raises its eyebrows in astonishment. Does religion scare Derrida, or should it be scared of him? Perhaps a little of both.”³⁰ Once the quotation marks are added, one adds to the complexity of meaning, not only of the word *religion*,³¹ but also of the quotation marks themselves (particularly with some-one as concerned with significations as Derrida).

In 2005, under the editorship of Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* was published.³² This contained the transcript of an interview with Derrida as well as numerous essays written by scholars of both religion and deconstruction. Prior to the mid-1990s this would, no doubt, have appeared an odd pairing, but no more odd than that of Derrida and Religion. In justification of their title, Hart and Sherwood initially comment that “given all that Derrida has given to religion, we wanted to acknowledge the gift”³³ and then add more decisively:

The once timid, now increasingly confident “and” in our title intimates a reciprocal influence between “Derrida” and “religion”: as Derrida draws on religious texts and phenomena to write of, say, the performative risk of the word, the bereavement of experience, or the opening to a justice to come, so his acts of writing suggest new ways of thinking of religion, a long way from limited secular tropes of possession and identity, such as having a religion, being religious, or having a God.³⁴

Certainly, Derrida introduces and uses concepts associated with religion in order to deconstruct and reinvent religions that have atrophied into rigid systems that are frequently oppressive. These concepts that proliferate in Derrida’s writing and have been employed by scores of scholars to deconstruct religious practices and texts, are often obviously understood as connected to one or another particular religion. Gil Anidjar, for example, states:

[T]here is moreover the undeniable fact that the study of religion has already benefitted greatly from Derrida’s extensive contributions and the growing recognition that, clearly, Derrida has spoken and written on religion, on the following terms of “religion”: God, for

³⁰ Kevin Hart, “‘Absolute Interruption’: On Faith,” in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2001), 189.

³¹ I place *religion* in emphasis in order to emphasise the word as opposed to the quotation marks, but in so doing something else is inadvertently added.

³² Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, eds., *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³³ Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, “Other Testaments,” in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood & Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5.

³⁴ Sherwood and Hart, “Other Testaments,” 11.

example, but also theology, negative theology, “a new atheistic discourse,” and the touch of Jesus and of Jean Luc Nancy . . . ; Islamic alms, circumcision (Arab, Jewish and other), angels, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and other religions . . . ; the Kabbalah, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, Paul, Augustine, The Talmud, messianism and messianicity, forgiveness, hospitality, prayer, and his prayer shawl . . . ; the spirit and the letter, and German Jews and Arab Jews . . . ; and more.³⁵

Over and above these terms that have an obvious religious flavour, Dawne McCance in *Derrida and Religion*³⁶ suggests ten “key terms” that “belong to the overall weave of Derrida’s work,”³⁷ while acknowledging the limitation of this list not only with regard to what is excluded, but also in the sense that what one gains in generally defining these terms comes at the cost of separating them from Derrida’s texts within which they are embedded. Nevertheless, it is impossible to engage Derrida on religion without being conscious of these concepts, which, as I have noted are not necessarily religious terms: deconstruction, phonocentrism, difference, trace, *khôra*, text, the impossible, hospitality, the messianic, and autoimmunity. McCance adds, in passing, the following: aporia, gram, iterability, pas, parergon, and supplement.³⁸ McCance then limits herself to examining ten of Derrida’s key texts that pertain to religion, but also highlights his work *Of Grammatology*, published in 1967, to suggest it is “probably the first text that students of Derrida should read.”³⁹ *Of Grammatology* although not explicitly or obviously *about* religion, is littered with religious allusions both direct and indirect.

John D. Caputo, probably more than anyone, has explored the religious themes in Derrida’s work. In this regard, we could further add to the list of “religious” terms: spectres, democracy, justice, the gift, the secret, the name, the other, passion, mourning and death; and the list need not stop there.⁴⁰

³⁵ Gil Anidjar, “Introduction: ‘Once More, Once More’: Derrida, the Arab and the Jew,” in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2. It should be noted that the ellipses in this quote represent lists of pertinent articles and books by Derrida that Anidjar specifically notes, in all twenty-seven, indicating how prolific Derrida’s output has been.

³⁶ Dawne McCance, *Derrida on Religion: Thinker of Difference* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2009).

³⁷ McCance, 19.

³⁸ McCance, 19-40.

³⁹ McCance, 41.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*.

But what of the term “religion” itself? Jonathan Z. Smith suggests that historically—“prior to the sixteenth century”—the word “religion” had a meaning largely “irrelevant to contemporary usage.”⁴¹ With reference to “Roman and early Christian Latin usage,” Smith observes that the various forms of the word—*religio/religiones* (noun), *religiosus* (adjective) and *religiose* (adverb)—“were cultic terms referring primarily to the careful performance of ritual obligation.”⁴² Smith further acknowledges three possible etymologies derived “from the root **leig*,⁴³ meaning ‘to bind,’ rather than from roots meaning ‘to reread’ or ‘to be careful’.”⁴⁴ In view of its dubious etymological origins, it is interesting that Derrida follows an etymology of religion that is somewhat opposed to deconstruction.

Acknowledging the Latin root *religio*, Derrida outlines Emile Benveniste’s examination of the word “religion” beginning with the direct translation “scruple”:

This is where the expression *religio est*, “to have scruples”, comes from. . . . This usage is constant during the classical period. . . . In sum, *religio* is a hesitation that holds back, a scruple that prevents, and not a sentiment that guides an action or that incites one to practice a cult. It seems to us that this meaning, demonstrated by ancient usage beyond the slightest ambiguity, imposes a single interpretation for *religio*: that which Cicero gives in attaching *religio* to *legere*.⁴⁵

Benveniste mentions Cicero’s additional etymology: *legere*—meaning “read” or “harvest, gather.”⁴⁶ One therefore ends up with *re-legere* or “re-read” or “re-gather.” Derrida notes this etymology together with another possible Latin etymology: *ligare*—meaning to bind or join together—which gives rise to *re-ligare* “linking religion to the *link*, precisely to obligation, ligament, and hence to obligation, to debt etc., between men [*sic*] or between men [*sic*] and God.”⁴⁷ These “two semantic sources perhaps overlap. They would even repeat one another not far from what in truth would be the origin of repetition, which is to say, the division of

⁴¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269.

⁴² Smith, 270.

⁴³ Smith uses the ‘*’ preceding the word in order to indicate the doubt associated with this etymological construction.

⁴⁴ Smith, 270.

⁴⁵ Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 521, quoted in Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 68n20.

⁴⁶ Benveniste, 521, quoted in Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 74.

⁴⁷ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 73-74.

the same.”⁴⁸ These ideas of “repetition” and “the same” suggested by both etymologies are evocative of the problem of religion itself. The concern is that *religio* or religion suggests, on the one hand, “a persistent bond that bonds itself first and foremost to itself” and, on the other, a “resistance or a reaction to dis-junction. To ab-solute alterity.”⁴⁹ From an etymological standpoint, at least, Derrida’s understanding of religion is quite alien to deconstruction and is closer to the antithesis of *différance*.

Within religious traditions, there are texts which are viewed as sacred: the Bible, for example. What is Derrida’s attitude to such *sacred texts* and the way they are used to instruct and inform beliefs systems? Of course, the Bible itself cannot be “blamed” for the way it is interpreted, and Caputo, for example, clearly finds resonances between deconstruction and certain readings of the Bible as evidenced in his statement to Derrida: “One of the things that fascinated me about your work . . . is how much *what you say about justice resonates with the biblical notions of justice and care for singularity* [emphasis added], as opposed to the philosophical notion, where justice is defined in terms of universality, of the blindness of justice.”⁵⁰ The difficulty with this statement is not that such “resonances” or connections cannot be made from Scripture to Derrida’s thinking, but rather the suggestion that the Bible has a stable position on what “biblical notions of justice” are.⁵¹ For instance, one could equally claim that what Derrida says about faith resonates with biblical notions of faith or, more specifically, Pauline notions of faith, as though “biblical notions” and “Pauline notions” only allow for one understanding with which everyone agrees. Derrida’s response is clear: “First, *I have no stable position on the texts you mentioned* [emphasis added], and I can receive the most necessary provocations from these texts as well as, at the same time, from

⁴⁸ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 71.

⁴⁹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 74.

⁵⁰ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 20.

⁵¹ I would like to emphasise that this analysis is not intended as a corrective or criticism of Caputo’s understanding of Derrida. There is little doubt that Caputo appreciates Derrida’s relation to the biblical text as well as the hermeneutical problems associated with reducing texts to a particular system of thought. In fact, Caputo discusses this very issue with regard to “Plato’s philosophy,” which “is an ensemble of ‘theses,’ of ‘philosophemes,’ of thematic philosophical ‘claims,’ which corresponds then to the ‘dominant,’ reproductive reading” and these “can be turned against the ‘text’ of Plato Privileging the philosophy of Plato is what Derrida means by ‘logocentrism’ . . . letting logic lead the letter. The result of this logocentric hegemony of the ‘philosophy’ . . . is that the text is neutralised” Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 83.

Plato and others.”⁵² Derrida can find these same resonances (“the most necessary provocations”) in the texts (“Plato and others”) that Caputo suggests, at least implicitly, do not have these evident resonances (“as opposed to the philosophical notion, where justice is defined in terms of universality”). More importantly, though, is the fact that because religious dogmatism uses texts such as the Bible as evidence of its “rightness,” deconstruction would treat any claims to be definitively “biblical” with suspicion:

For me, there is no such thing as “religion”. Within what one calls religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or other religions—there are again tensions, heterogeneity, disruptive volcanos, sometimes texts, especially those of the prophets, which cannot be reduced to an institution, to a corpus, to a system. I want to keep the right to read these texts in a way which has to be constantly reinvented. It is something which can be totally new at every moment.⁵³

Derrida has no issue or problem with the Bible. The difficulty is when a religious group interprets the Bible and then names this interpretation “biblical” as though it is the only valid interpretation amongst all others.

Derrida seems to be attracted to particular philosophers and theological thinkers rather than the Bible. With regard to the above quoted passage, for example, Derrida observes that he “would distinguish between religion and faith. If by religion you mean a set of beliefs, dogmas, or institutions—the church, e.g.—then I would say that religion as such can be deconstructed, and not only can be but should be deconstructed, sometimes in the name of faith.”⁵⁴ At this point Derrida notes his affinity for Kierkegaard who is “a great example of some paradoxical way of contesting religious discourse in the name of a faith that cannot be simply mastered or domesticated or taught or logically understood, a faith that is paradoxical.”⁵⁵ Unlike (many) Christian theologians, Derrida is not interested in discovering a hermeneutical method by which he can “correctly” unpack or exegete the Bible. Caputo states that what has *fascinated* him is the degree to which Derrida’s notion of justice “resonates with biblical notions of justice” This is not a fascination that Derrida, himself, shares. Derrida is drawn to—one might say is fascinated by—various philosophical

⁵² Jacques Derrida, “The Villanova Roundtable,” in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 21.

⁵³ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 21.

⁵⁴ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 21.

⁵⁵ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 21.

thinkers. In this case, he is attracted by Kierkegaard's analysis of faith which "is not religious, strictly speaking; at least it cannot be totally determined by a given religion."⁵⁶

Returning to the notion of "religion without religion" and what this phrase might mean, one could be tempted to rephrase it as "religion without 'a set of beliefs, dogmas and institutions'," particularly in the light of Derrida's usage of the phrase in *The Gift of Death*, where Derrida examines Jan Patočka's⁵⁷ critique of historical Christianity.⁵⁸ I will follow Derrida's argument carefully in order to unpack this phrase "religion without religion."

Derrida examines "Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?" in Jan Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*:⁵⁹ "Patočka relates secrecy [French: *le secret* meaning both secrecy and a secret], or more precisely the mystery of the sacred, to responsibility."⁶⁰ Not unlike Levinas (I will examine Levinas's relation to the sacred later), Patočka warns "against an experience of the sacred as an enthusiasm or fervor for fusion, cautioning . . . against a form of demonic rapture that has as its effect, and often as its first intention, the removal of responsibility."⁶¹ Patočka wants to distinguish between religion and "the demonic form of sacralisation."⁶² Religion, on the one hand, has a responsibility to the other (the phrases initially used by Derrida are "religion presumes access to the responsibility of a free self" and "responsibility on the other") and, on the other hand, exhibits the demonic (by which is meant an "affinity with mystery, the initiatory, the esoteric, the secret or the sacred").⁶³

⁵⁶ Derrida, "Villanova Roundtable," 22.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that what follows is Derrida's reading of Patočka. I am not interested in defending the accuracy or legitimacy of Derrida's understanding in this regard, and the same can be said for other authors that I encounter in Derrida's text: Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, Kierkegaard, Lévi-Strauss and so on. My concern, in most instances, is to unpack Derrida's text, and these thinkers are only mentioned because they occur in his text.

⁵⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 50.

⁵⁹ Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. James Dodd, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 3.

⁶⁰ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 3.

⁶¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 3.

⁶² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 3-4.

⁶³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 4.

Patočka examines the notion of “religion, in the proper sense of the term”⁶⁴ and in this Patočka is concerned to examine his own religion, that is, the Christian religion. Religion, then, properly exists “once the secret of the sacred, orgiastic, or demonic mystery has been, if not destroyed, at least integrated and finally subjected to the sphere of responsibility.”⁶⁵ Religion is a passage to responsibility. Religion makes the orgiastic or demonic mystery subject to itself, but, more than this, “religion comes into being the moment that the experience of responsibility extracts itself from that form of secrecy called demonic mystery.”⁶⁶ This is done, according to Patočka “only in order, at the same time, to freely subject itself to the wholly and infinite other that sees without being seen.”⁶⁷ With this in mind, Patočka asks why modern Europe suffers “from ignorance of its history [which could be described as a *Christian* history], from a failure to assume its responsibility, that is, the memory of its history *as* history of responsibility.”⁶⁸

Patočka argues that Platonism, in the first place, *incorporates* the demonic mystery/the orgiastic sacred, while Christianity *represses* Platonism. The logic of Patočka follows this structure: “We escape the demonic orgiastic by means of the Platonic triumph, and we escape the latter by means of the sacrifice or repentance of the Christian ‘reversal,’ that is, by means of the Christian ‘repression’.”⁶⁹ But Christianity⁷⁰ has not adequately freed itself from “the Platonic triumph” (through which it also incorporates the orgiastic sacred), and because the trace/spectre of Platonism is repressed, it is not recognised or noticed as an illegitimate presence in Christianity. Christianity has not yet fulfilled its own promise. That which is authentically Christian has not yet come to fruition: “What has not yet come about is the fulfilment . . . in European politics, of the new responsibility announced by the *mysterium*

⁶⁴ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 4.

⁶⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 4.

⁶⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 5.

⁶⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 5.

⁶⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 6.

⁶⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 24.

⁷⁰ This term “Christianity” could be confusing. Patočka (in Derrida’s reading of him) is critical of the way “Christianity” has been practiced in the history of the Christian West. For Patočka, it is not “true” Christianity. Derrida’s interest is not in finding what Christianity ought to be, rather he seems to be drawn by Patočka’s “heretical” Christianity that is a call for responsibility and could be described as a “religion without religion.” My particular concern, of course, is to contextualise Derrida’s use of the term “religion without religion.”

tremendum. There has not yet been an authentically Christian politics because there remains this residue of the Platonic polis.”⁷¹ Christian consciousness cannot reflect on the Platonic thinking it represses and is also incapable of reflecting on the orgiastic mystery that Platonism incorporates. What a (Christian) person is is not adequately thematized and this inadequacy “comes to rest on the threshold of responsibility.”⁷² Responsibility calls for a decision that is not merely repetition, and so responsibility is “tied to heresy” or (in the vocabulary of the Catholic Church) “divergence from a doctrine.”⁷³ Since responsibility is now a “divergence or departure” that is separate from “what is publicly or commonly declared”—in other words, responsibility is heresy—it is, therefore, destined “to the resistance or dissidence of a type of secrecy.”⁷⁴

Patočka’s Christianity, therefore, (which has not existed throughout European history) breaks absolutely with Catholic (or Protestant) orthodoxy. It is herein that one can begin to understand why Derrida compares Patočka’s Christianity to a “religion without religion.” For Derrida, however, the Christianity of Patočka, or that of Patočka’s text, “is of limited pertinence” since the “Christian themes can be seen to revolve around the *gift* as gift of death.”⁷⁵ Derrida then names the themes: “infinite love (the Good as goodness that infinitely forgets itself), sin and salvation, repentance and sacrifice.”⁷⁶ These themes have a “logic that at bottom . . . has no need of *the event of a revelation or the revelation of an event*.”⁷⁷ It is this “revelation” that enables a discourse on religion that is related to dogma or an article of faith. Derrida is drawn by these themes—infinite love, sin and salvation, repentance and sacrifice—but has no inclination to connect them to any divine epiphany, and would rather examine them without regard for any orthodox religious affiliations that *could* be implied by them: hence “religion without religion.” In this respect, Derrida suggests other thinkers:

⁷¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 30.

⁷² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 30.

⁷³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 30.

⁷⁴ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 30.

⁷⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 49. It is not necessary to explore these themes here, although it is these very themes that draw Derrida and not the Christian context where they are located. Certainly, the notion of the “gift of death” evokes the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and from this one can therefore understand the connection to the related themes Derrida mentions (infinite love, sin and salvation and so forth).

⁷⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 49-50.

⁷⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 50.

Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Ricoeur, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. All of these may be said to “belong to this tradition that consists in proposing a nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a *thinking* that ‘repeats’ the *possibility* of religion without religion.”⁷⁸

Derrida, himself, has no interest in the religious or theological dogma of Christianity. His interest in Christianity is only piqued by the fact that it is historically unavoidable in the European context. He is bound by this history to speak of religion (Christianity) and is inevitably drawn into a discourse that is at its root religious, discussing religious themes, with religious significance. The very fact, however, that he invokes Patočka who is “heretical” with regard to Christianity, indicates that this idea of the “*possibility* of religion without religion” is not going to fit into any neatly defined Christian (or religious) system of dogma. The point, here, is that Derrida ascribes the term “religion with religion” to certain other philosophical and theological thinkers, but not directly to himself, although it does appear to be something with which he is willing to align himself.

Kevin Hart also suggests that “Derrida’s later thoughts on religion can be organized around his phrase ‘religion without religion’.”⁷⁹ The evident dilemma with this phrase is that if the first “religion” is the same as the second “religion” then one is left with nothing. If, however, the first “religion” does not denote or connote the same meaning as the second, then it becomes necessary to differentiate one from the other. It could also be added that the term itself may be a disparaging one. For example, Terry Eagleton refers to Derrida’s Marxism in *Specters of Marx* as “Marxism without Marxism, which is to say a Marxism on his own coolly appropriative terms.”⁸⁰ Eagleton, then, (sarcastically) translates Derrida’s description of what this Marxism might be into a comparable religious idiom. The double irony being that what he has written rings true, if one removes the sarcasm:

It would not be difficult to translate this [Derrida’s appropriation of Marxism] into tones of a (suitably caricatured) liberal Anglicanism: we must distinguish the *spirit* of Christianity [The particular Derrida quote begins similarly: “We would be tempted to distinguish this *spirit* of the Marxist critique . . .”] from such metaphysical baggage as the existence of God, the

⁷⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 50.

⁷⁹ Kevin Hart, “Religion,” in *Understanding Derrida*, ed. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Price (New York: Continuum, 2004), 57.

⁸⁰ Terry Eagleton, “Marxism without Marxism,” in *Ghostly Demarcations*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 86.

divinity of Christ, organized religion, the doctrine of the resurrection, the superstition of the Eucharist and the rest.⁸¹

Eagleton, hence, implies that Derrida with his use of *sans* (“without”) is simultaneously purging the concept of the meaning that it basically intends—in this case Marxism or Christianity—thereby annihilating the point of the designation. Marxism without Marxism, Christianity without Christianity or, religion without religion are, respectively, no longer Marxist, Christian or religious. But is this what Derrida really intends with this use of *sans*?

In “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy,” Derrida proposes the phrase “apocalypse *without* apocalypse.”⁸² The word “without” is placed in “the so necessary syntax of Blanchot, who often says *X without X*.”⁸³ Elsewhere Derrida describes this as a “strange syntax.”⁸⁴ Caputo in defining *sans*—which he does in a subsection incorporating the phrase “An Apocalypse *sans* Apocalypse”⁸⁵ in its title—relates it to “prayers and tears,” a phrase that shapes the title of his book and evokes ideas of worship and religion:

When Derrida speaks of his prayers and tears in *Circumfession*, he means not the determinate prayer of a determinable faith, but the deeply affirmative invocation, the *oui, oui*. Such a prayer would be . . . a prayer without a prayer, the prayer of the *sans*, in a religion without religion, a religion of the *sans*. This *sans* separates Derrida’s prayers and tears from, even as it joins them to, the determinable faiths.⁸⁶

At the very least (and this “least” is allowed by the fact that in the phrase “religion without religion,” for example, there is still a “joining” to religion, an acknowledgement of religion), the *sans* used by Derrida is in order to critique determined religions and distance himself from them.

The *sans* is also a technique of negative theology which Derrida notes with reference to Augustine via Meister Eckhart who often “cites the ‘without’ of Saint Augustine, that quasi-negative predication of the singular without concept, for example: ‘God is wise *without*

⁸¹ Eagleton, 86.

⁸² Jacques Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 66.

⁸³ Derrida, “Apocalyptic Tone,” 67.

⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), 83 in Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 97.

⁸⁵ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 88-101.

⁸⁶ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 97.

wisdom, good *without* goodness, powerful *without* power.”⁸⁷ With Derrida’s affinity for the methods and techniques of negative theology, there is little wonder that *sans* finds regular expression.

I would like to suggest that if one is to apply this phrase “religion without religion” to Derrida, then a clear window into what could be meant is provided by Derrida’s description of the messianic as “messianicity without messianism.”⁸⁸ I will elaborate on this phrase later but for the moment it is worth noting that Derrida prefers the word “faith” to religion. With respect to Derrida’s understanding of the messianic, Caputo heads a section in the chapter “The Messianic: Waiting for the Future”: “Faith Without Religion.”⁸⁹ And then, with reference to *Specters of Marx* states that “deconstruction turns on *faith*, but on faith ‘without religion,’⁹⁰ faith as distinguished from religion in the sense of the several religious messianisms, on faith as non-knowing”⁹¹ Quoting Derrida precisely, it becomes increasingly evident that there are terms that Derrida prefers and, quite clearly, “religion” is not one of them and belongs in the realm of that which can—and probably should—be deconstructed:

Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice—which we distinguish from law or right or even from human rights—and an idea of democracy—which we distinguish from its current concept and from it determined predicates today.⁹²

If one is to turn to a faith divested of all religion, this does not necessarily mean that the sacred or the holy is also removed: “All sacredness and all holiness are not necessarily, in the strict sense of the term, if there is one, religious.”⁹³

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, “*Sauf le nom (Post Scriptum)*,” in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. John P. Leavey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 40.

⁸⁸ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 56.

⁸⁹ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 164.

⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 74.

⁹¹ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 165.

⁹² Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 74.

⁹³ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 48.

1.1.2. Negative Theology

Derrida's work, almost from the outset, has been aligned with negative theology and this alignment has often been stated as an indictment, largely, it seems, in order to suggest that Derrida's work was somewhat without content itself, or worse, nihilistic:

[Very] early on I was accused of—rather than congratulated for—resifting the procedures of negative theology in a scenario that one thinks one knows well. One would like to consider these procedures a simple rhetoric, even a rhetoric of failure—or worse, a rhetoric that renounces knowledge, conceptual determination, and analysis: for those who have nothing to say or don't want to know anything, it is always easy to mimic the technique of negative theology.⁹⁴

In addition, negative theology taken to its limit could be said to result in atheism or, at least, be likened to atheism. As Derrida observes: “The *apophasis* is a declaration, an explanation, a response that, taking on the subject of God a negative interrogative form (for that is also what *apophasis* means), at times so resembles a profession of atheism as to be mistaken for it.”⁹⁵ And yet, Derrida also notes that though negative theology “inclines toward atheism, can't one say that, on the other hand or thereby, the extreme and most consequent form of declared atheism will have always testified [*témoigné*] to the most intense desire of God?”⁹⁶ A question to which Derrida responds with a typical “yes and no.”⁹⁷ It is not necessary to unpack Derrida's meaning here, save to note that Derrida's “atheism” or use of negative theology is evidently not borne of hatred towards God, nihilistic tendencies or, indeed, as a means to justify or sustain unbelief.

While Derrida has been aware of the semblance of negative theology in his methods, he has also maintained a distinction: “So much so that the detours, locutions, and syntax in which I will often have to take recourse will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology.”⁹⁸ Not only this, negative theology has a fundamentally paradoxical relationship with positive theology, as Caputo observes in analysing Derrida's “fascination” with “the impossible situation in

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, trans. Ken Frieden (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 74-75.

⁹⁵ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 35.

⁹⁶ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 36.

⁹⁷ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 37.

⁹⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 6, quoted in Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 131-32.

which negative or apophatic theology finds itself.”⁹⁹ It denies “that it is possible to speak of God even while, as theology, it keeps on speaking.”¹⁰⁰

By way of example, Hans Küng in *Does God Exist?*¹⁰¹ is careful to examine the “great tradition of *theologia negativa*, descending from Neoplatonism” and found in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, Scotus Eriugena and Meister Eckhart.¹⁰² Derrida, himself, makes extensive reference to Eckhart in “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials.”¹⁰³ Küng notes that even Aquinas maintained that “any determination applied to God by analogy with man [*sic*] or the world requires a negation,”¹⁰⁴ and that God’s essential nature is concealed from human reason. Hence, Aquinas concurs with Pseudo-Dionysius when he asserts that “all that man [*sic*] knows of God is to know that he [*sic*] does not know him [*sic*], since he [*sic*] knows that God surpasses all that we can understand of him [*sic*].”¹⁰⁵ Küng’s insights, however, are primarily driven by the work of Nicholas of Cusa, who asserted that “God is accessible only to ‘instructed ignorance’,” and “any kind of affirmative theology without negative theology turns God into a creature of our mind and worship of God into idolatry.”¹⁰⁶ Küng offers the following conclusions, which suggest an uncanny resonance with deconstructive thought (and one should note that while Küng—this work was published in 1982—is highly cognisant of Heidegger’s contributions in this regard, there is no evidence whatsoever, no reason to suppose, that Derrida has directly influenced him at all):

God cannot be grasped in any concept, cannot be fully expressed in any statement, cannot be defined in any definition: [God] is the incomprehensible, inexpressible, indefinable. . . . Every statement on God therefore must come through the dialectic of affirmation and negation,

⁹⁹ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 2.

¹⁰¹ The nature of Küng’s project would seem to fall totally within the ambit of a positive theology if the title is taken as the primary indicator.

¹⁰² Hans Küng, *Does God Exist? An Answer for Today*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 601.

¹⁰³ See Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 78, 83, 89, 100, 113-15, 120-21, 124, 128.

¹⁰⁴ Küng, 601.

¹⁰⁵ Küng, 601.

¹⁰⁶ Küng, 601.

every experience of God must come through the ambivalence of being and non-being. Before God, all talk emerges from listening in silence and leads to speaking in silence.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, this resonance, in truth, is ill-founded, since (and this is true of Küng's project) "negative theology is always a higher, more refined way of affirming that God exists, or hyperexists or exists-by-not-existing, that God is really real or hyper-real or sur-real."¹⁰⁸ Negative theology is in the service of the God of onto-theology, "delivering a service of which the metaphysics of presence can only dream."¹⁰⁹ Derrida's recourse to the "discursive resources of negative theology"¹¹⁰ should not be confused with endorsement. "For Derrida, negative theology is an event *within* language, something happening *to* language, a certain trembling or fluctuation *of* language."¹¹¹

This means that if Derrida is to speak of God, he cannot merely have recourse to the language of negative theology. But, then, how is one to speak of God? "How to avoid speaking *of Being*?"¹¹² Derrida, refers to two instances where Heidegger "explicitly proposed to avoid . . . the word *being*."¹¹³ The first is to write "being" (*sein*) under erasure (*sous rature*), that is, crossed out, thus signifying both presence and absence.¹¹⁴ The second is to

¹⁰⁷ Küng, 601-2.

¹⁰⁸ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 10.

¹¹¹ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 11.

¹¹² Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 124.

¹¹³ Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 124.

¹¹⁴ In a certain sense, writing under erasure, signifying both presence and absence, is somewhat similar to Derrida's use of *sans* (without). So the phrase "religion without religion," for example, could be a method of signifying both presence and absence, something that could also be signified by writing the word "religion" under erasure.

not write the word being, in which regard Derrida quotes Heidegger¹¹⁵—“If I *were* yet to write a theology, as I am sometimes tempted to do, the word ‘being’ *ought* not appear there”¹¹⁶—and then offers this response:

Hasn’t Heidegger written what he says he would have liked to write, a theology *without* the word *being*? But didn’t he also write what he says should not be written, what he should not have written, namely a theology that is opened, dominated, and invaded by the word *being*? With and without the word *being*, he wrote a theology with and without God.¹¹⁷

Of course, Derrida’s relationship to Heidegger has been described, with considerable justification, as a “complex, ambivalent and constantly evolving dialogue.”¹¹⁸ In the same article, albeit in the endnotes, Derrida makes considerable reference to the work of philosopher and Christian theologian Jean-Luc Marion. Although Derrida is not completely unequivocal in his praise of Marion, his comments indicate that the manner in which Marion *writes* has parallels with deconstructive thought or, at least, avoids the pitfalls of onto-theology.

Derrida notes that in *God Without Being*¹¹⁹ (French: *Dieu sans l’être*), Marion, writing “by an analogous but no doubt radically different gesture” to Heidegger’s “being under

¹¹⁵ Heidegger observes in the endnotes of *Being and Time* (and this suggests a detour into Heidegger’s understanding of “presence” in relation to the “eternity” of God, as well as the limitations of negative theology in this regard, although Heidegger leaves the question open—it “remains to be seen”): “The fact that the traditional conception of ‘eternity’ as signifying the ‘standing “now”’ (*nunc stans*), has been drawn from the ordinary way of understanding time and has been defined with an orientation towards the idea of ‘constant’ presence-at-hand does not need to be discussed in detail here [a reference to Heidegger’s main text]. If God’s eternity can be ‘construed’ philosophically, then it may be understood only as more primordial temporality which is ‘infinite’. Whether the way afforded by the *via negationis et eminentiae* is a possible one, remains to be seen.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1962, 499, nxiii.

¹¹⁶ Derrida offers the following endnote and I quote precisely: “This seminar was translated and presented by F. Dédier and D. Saatchian in the review *Po&sie* (1980, vol. 13), and the passage I quote was also translated in the same year by Jean Greisch in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu*, p. 334. The German text of the privately circulated edition was quoted, for the passage that interests us by J.-L. Marion, in *Dieu sans l’être*, p. 93.” Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 141n32.

¹¹⁷ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 128. I note, in passing, that the repeated phrase (ascribed by Derrida to Heidegger) “with and without” contains both an affirmation and a negation, unlike, the simple negation of the *sans* that finds more frequent expression in Derrida’s work. For example, “religion without religion” is not the same as “religion with and without religion” even though the former possibly contains the trace of the latter.

¹¹⁸ Christopher Norris, “Metaphysics,” in *Understanding Derrida*, ed. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Price (New York: Continuum, 2004), 14.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

erasure,” similarly “inscribes the name of God under a cross” with its obvious allusion to the crucifixion.¹²⁰ In addition, “*Dieu sans l’être*” is a “magnificent title,”¹²¹ says Derrida.

Its very suspension depends on the grammatical vacillation that only French syntax can tolerate—precisely in the structure of the title—that is, of a nominal or incomplete phrase. *L’* may be the definite article of the noun *être* (God *without Being*), but it can also be a personal pronoun—object of the *verb* to be—referring to God, from God to God Himself [*sic*] who would not be what He [*sic*] is or who would be what He [*sic*] is *without being (it)* (God *without being God, God without being*): God with and without being.¹²²

Derrida’s notion of the trace gives an insight into exactly what distinguishes Marion’s *God Without Being* from negative theology. Gayatri Spivak notes that Derrida “gives the name of ‘trace’ to the part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign.”¹²³ This statement is elaborated:

... Derrida suggested that what opens the possibility of thought is not merely the question of being, but also the never-annulled difference from the “completely other.” Such is the strange “being” of the sign: half of it always “not there” and the other half always “not that.” The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent. This other is of course never to be found in its full being. As even empirical events such as answering a child’s question or consulting the dictionary proclaim, one sign leads to another and so on indefinitely.¹²⁴

The sign, by its very presence, marks an absence, and this mark is the trace, that is, the exemplar of *différance*, in that it differs in the evident meaning of the sign, and this meaning is deferred (not present). This is unlike negative theology which negates in order to affirm and, according to Spivak, also differs from Heidegger’s “being under erasure” which, she suggests, “might point to an inarticulable presence.”¹²⁵ For Derrida, the “trace under erasure”

¹²⁰ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 141n32. That is, Marion writes the word God under erasure (more precisely the ‘o’ in God has an ‘x’ inscribed upon it), in a similar manner that Heidegger would write “being” under erasure. Since the cross is inscribed on the word “God” it simultaneously denotes the death (crucifixion) of Jesus (who is God).

¹²¹ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 141n32.

¹²² Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 141n32.

¹²³ Spivak, xvii. “Trace” is the translation coined by Spivak for the French word used by Derrida—*trace*—meaning, possibly, tracks, marks, trace and so forth. Spivak observes with regard to this choice: “I stick to ‘trace’ in my translation, because it ‘looks the same’ as Derrida’s word; the reader must remind [her/himself] of at least the track, even the spoor, contained within the French word.” Spivak, xvii.

¹²⁴ Spivak, xvii.

¹²⁵ Spivak, xvii.

is “the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.”¹²⁶

Since, then, for Derrida, “negative theology is an event within language,” one can further locate negative theology *within* the trace: “But Derrida is not . . . ruling out religious faith, or negative theology; rather he resituates them, relocates them, finds their site (*lieu*) within the trace.”¹²⁷ Having said this, it is also evident that *différance*, like deconstruction, like negative theology, “turns on its desire for the *tout autre*.”¹²⁸ But negative theology reduces this wholly other to God, whereas *différance* and deconstruction do not have any specific other in mind. “The other is God or no matter whom, more precisely, no matter what singularity, as soon as any other is totally other [*tout autre est tout autre*].”¹²⁹

The idea of the trace refers to that which is not evidently present. Do the negations of negative theology move it outside of language, as such? It is a question that Derrida reiterates in “*Sauf le Nom*.” “Isn’t it [negative theology] what, in essence, exceeds language, so that the ‘essence’ of negative theology would carry itself outside of language?”¹³⁰ Derrida addresses this question while keeping in mind the validity or lack thereof of the proposition: “What is called ‘negative theology,’ in an idiom of Greco-Latin filiation, is a language [*langage*].”¹³¹ Since negative theology could be described as a “rarefaction” or “desertification” or “*kenosis*” of language, it tends to direct one away from language (the written words and concepts) towards the trace. It is here that the relation of negative theology can be seen with regard not only to *différance*—which Derrida repeatedly describes as not being a word or a concept¹³²—but also *khôra*.¹³³

Derrida in moving back to an originary point that may locate the “site” in which negative theology takes “place,” refers, via Angelus Silesius and *The Cherubic Wanderer*, to creation and the notion of play: “*God plays with creation*. All that is play that the Deity

¹²⁶ Spivak, xvii.

¹²⁷ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 58.

¹²⁸ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 4.

¹²⁹ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 74.

¹³⁰ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 48.

¹³¹ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 48.

¹³² For example, Derrida, “*Différance*,” 3.

¹³³ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 48-76.

gives itself: It has imagined the creature for Its pleasure.”¹³⁴ Negative theology, since it has no specific reference within language, “can only present itself as one of the most playful forms of the creature’s participation in the divine play.”¹³⁵ Derrida, in asserting this, should not be seen as actually ascribing to a specific idea of God, the “God” of negative theology, for instance, but it is no surprise that in searching for this “place” of “play,” Derrida takes a detour, namely, *khôra*:

Is this place created by God? Is it part of the play? Or else is it God himself?¹³⁶ Or even what precedes, in order to make them possible, both God and his Play? In other words it remains to be known if this nonsensible (invisible and inaudible) place is opened by God, by the name of God (which again would be some other thing, perhaps), or if it is “older” than the time of creation, than time itself, than history, narrative, word, etc. It remains to be known (beyond knowing) if the place is opened by appeal (the response, revelation, history, etc.), or if it remains impassively foreign, like *Khôra*, to everything that takes its place and replaces itself and plays within this place, including what is named God. Let’s call this the test of *Khôra*¹³⁷

Derrida is suspicious of definitive answers to the questions he has posed. “It remains to be known” he tells us twice, and once suggests that it is “beyond knowing.” Is the play of negative theology something “instituted” prior to creation in the sense that God precedes creation? The question is problematic because it assumes too much. It strives to reach beyond language to God, but since one is trying to reach God with recourse to the *name* of God, which is actually located in language itself, one is trapped. Negative theology itself needs to break the shackles of language if it is going to reach anything other than the name. “The passage to the other, to the totally other”—whether one wishes to name the other God or not—“is hospitality.”¹³⁸

Derrida uses the tower of Babel narrative¹³⁹ in an attempt (at least analogically) to locate the “place” that gives space (is hospitable) to negative theology, which itself has the

¹³⁴ Angelus Silesius, *II The Cherubic Wanderer*, 2:198, quoted in Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 75.

¹³⁵ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 75.

¹³⁶ In general I have endeavoured to use inclusive language, but this particular quotation, which uses the male pronoun for God, could be an exception. Since the very idea of a clearly identified “God” is problematic for negative theology and Derrida wants to bring into question this *named* God, it matters not that this God is identified with maleness. It is a God that is going to be deposed anyway.

¹³⁷ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 75-76.

¹³⁸ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 80.

¹³⁹ See also Jacques Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, trans. Joseph F. Graham (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1:191-225. I will examine this essay in detail later.

goal of discovering the other—recall that the goal of the builders at Babel was to reach God. What is lost at Babel is the originary universal language that was fragmented into a myriad of “other” languages. The narrative is “at once construction and deconstruction.”¹⁴⁰ There is the construction of the tower and a universal language and there is a tower in deconstruction and confusion, and a multiplicity of tongues. To reach God is not possible by the confused languages simply because this was the very reason that God confused the languages. Yet the universal pre-Babelian tongue is not available and so it is necessary to find another way, a *third* way: negative theology. Since God cannot be found by affirmations in the confused, multiple post-Babelian languages, negative theology provides an alternative route that is not tied to any particular language while nevertheless utilising the “detours, locutions and syntax” of language. As an oscillation between the universal and the multiple, “‘negative theology’ is caught, comprised and comprehensive at once.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the narrative of Babel itself is a “(hi)story” that is tied to the sensible and is an affirmation of events, whether one wishes to speak about the construction of the tower or its deconstruction. Derrida, hence, suggests “an indeconstructible *Khôra*”¹⁴² as another place, a third option:

the place that gives rise and place to Babel would be indeconstructible, not as a construction whose foundations would be sure, sheltered from every internal or external deconstruction, but as the very spacing of de-construction. There is where that happens and where there are those ‘things’ called, for example, negative theology and its analogues, deconstruction and its analogues, this colloquium here and its analogues.¹⁴³

In this movement towards where negative theology is located in relation to language, I am striving to highlight a coalescence, let me say, of third ways/types (*triton genos*) which I believe can assist in unravelling a road to the sacred. These are *khôra*, *différance* and detours. Just as negative theology is a third way (between the universal and the multiple) that reaches towards the God of Babel, these are other ways that can lead towards the sacred. Before examining these third ways, I will try to identify that which is sacred to Derrida.

¹⁴⁰ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 80.

¹⁴¹ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 80.

¹⁴² Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 80.

¹⁴³ Derrida, “*Sauf le nom*,” 80-81.

1.1.3. The Sacred

The sacred tends to identify itself with religion or the religious. One might even suggest that the sacred is located within religion. But since religion in any traditional or definitive sense is problematic for Derrida, the sacred needs to be disentangled from any such religious affiliations. In order to accomplish this, I will unpack Derrida's uses of the sacred, few of which are unequivocally positive. This, in a large part, occurs because of the obvious binary oppositions that are presented by the very word: sacred/profane; sacred/common; sacred/demonic as well as other related categories, such as clean/unclean; holy/unholy etc. Ultimately, in order to find a stable (the adjective is not without irony) site (for want of a better word) for a particular understanding of the sacred that is consistent with Derrida's thinking, I will take a detour through Derrida's ideas of *khôra* and the messianic.

What Derrida means when he uses the word "sacred" is not immediately evident nor is it necessarily consistent. The French—*sacré*—clearly sharing a common root with the English, provides no obvious additional insight. In a biblical context, one stumbles on the word "holy"—the Hebrew root being transliterated *qdsh*. Whether in the verbal form (*qadash*) or as a noun (*qodesh*), the idea of holiness or the sacred is denoted—including the idea of being separated or set apart. Hence, the sacred stands in direct contrast to that which is "common or profane" as in Leviticus 10:10: "You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the clean and the unclean" (NIV). Here "*qodesh* occurs as the antithesis of *hol* ('profane,' 'common')." ¹⁴⁴

The cultic activities of biblical Israel, according to Gerhard von Rad, "have their place and significance in and for a world which in God's sight was divided into clean and unclean, holy and secular, blessing and curse." ¹⁴⁵ This idea of holiness began with the land which was, in fact, "Jahweh's land" (Lev. 25:23) and all that fell within this land, e.g. the camp (Lev. 6:4), Jerusalem (Isa. 52:2) as well as the city wall (Neh. 12:30), the Temple hill (Ps. 24:3), the Temple (1 Kings 9:3), the Tabernacle in the wilderness (Num. 1:51), the vessels and parts of the Tabernacle (Num. 4:15), the priests (Lev. 21:1-15) and their clothes (Ex. 29:29), and the offerings (Lev. 6:2). ¹⁴⁶ Incorporated in this idea of the holy, then, is implied an inward

¹⁴⁴ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), s.v. "1990."

¹⁴⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM Press, 1975), 272.

¹⁴⁶ Von Rad, 272-73.

and an outward, or an inside and an outside. In this regard, von Rad notes: “The description of the Philistines as ‘uncircumcised’ . . . shows to what a degree the contrast between outward and inward was still felt to be a sacral and not a national matter.”¹⁴⁷

Notions of “clean and unclean” were extended to food, sickness and sexuality. For example, in the latter category, “anyone who was in a state of special cultic immediacy to Jahweh . . . had to abstain from sexual relationships. . . . Serious sexual offences polluted not only the offender but even the land.”¹⁴⁸ These binary ideas—sacred/profane, holy/unholy, clean/unclean—that were applied to matters that concerned day to day living provided a tension that pointed to the ultimate binary: life/death. In short, “every uncleanness was to some extent already a precursor of the thing that was uncleanness out and out, death.”¹⁴⁹

Kim Knott in *The Location of Religion*, quoting Veiko Anttonen, points out that “people participate in sacred-making activities and processes and significations according to paradigms given by the belief systems to which they are committed, whether they be religious, national or ideological.”¹⁵⁰ With regard to human sexuality, Knott observes that gender difference—male and female—presents categories that society, in particular Western society, for the most part has *sacralised* into a stable dichotomy. The idea that homosexuality presents a viable and sexually fulfilled alternative (in marriage, for example) is seen as “sacrilegious and impure.”¹⁵¹

What this reveals is the way in which, in modern, mixed Judeo-Christian/secular cultures, what we call the “sacred” is still at work. The “fundamental category boundary” of gender difference (on the basis of which heterosexual relations are posited) continues to be invested with special value. Its “sacred” quality, which goes unnoticed much of the time, comes to the fore when the boundary is publicly under threat, in this case from the contagion of homosexuality.¹⁵²

The issue for Knott is that the boundaries, so clearly inscribed, precisely delineating the sacred—in this case, gender distinction mitigated by homosexuality—are actually

¹⁴⁷ Von Rad, 272.

¹⁴⁸ Von Rad, 273.

¹⁴⁹ Von Rad, 277.

¹⁵⁰ Veiko Anttonen, “Sacred,” in *A Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 281, quoted in Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005), 222.

¹⁵¹ Anttonen, 277, quoted in Knott, 226.

¹⁵² Knott, 226.

“precarious.” This very precariousness makes homosexuality “a cause for anxiety and a contagious condition which is seen to threaten collective order and survival.”¹⁵³ In a biblical (New Testament) context the offence of the contagion (disease) is placed side by side with demon possession: “And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto [Jesus] all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.”¹⁵⁴ In a religious (Christian) context, then, binaries often function to identify ultimate evil and anyone who disagrees (threatens the stability of the dichotomy) may be identified as a servant of the demonic.

The alignment of the demonic with the sacred, as noted earlier, finds expression in *Heretical Essays on Philosophy of History* in Derrida’s analysis of Jan Patočka’s “Secrets of European Responsibility.”¹⁵⁵ Here the sacred is connected negatively with “a form of demonic rapture” which is variously, but most notably named, “the demonic secret” and “the orgiastic sacred.”¹⁵⁶ This orgiastic sacred is a kind of magical religion, something mystical and fantastical that can enrapture adherents by its allure, but has no evident foothold in ethical or moral considerations, and thus, in Patočka’s usage, according to Derrida, stands in contrast to responsibility. Religion can only be considered once these notions of the secret and the sacred have been “surpassed.”¹⁵⁷ “In the proper sense of the word, religion exists once the secret of the sacred, orgiastic, or demonic mystery has been, if not destroyed, at least integrated, and finally subjected to the sphere of responsibility.”¹⁵⁸ In this regard, then, “Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all.”¹⁵⁹ The sacred, is something “divine” that is separated from the human and “religion comes into being the moment the experience of

¹⁵³ Knott, 225-26.

¹⁵⁴ Mark 1:32 (AV).

¹⁵⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 3-35.

¹⁵⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 4.

¹⁵⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 5.

responsibility extracts itself from the form of secrecy called demonic mystery.”¹⁶⁰ The (orgiastic) sacred is thereby distanced (negatively) from religion.¹⁶¹

Related to this is the manner in which Levinas makes a clear distinction between the sacred (*le sacré*) and the holy (*la sainteté*).¹⁶² In *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Levinas aligns the sacred with sorcery, opposing it to the holy, thus making the sacred (*le sacré*) negative and the holy (*la sainteté*) positive. Derrida is not unaware of this distinction and notes the “dissociation” that “Levinas wishes to maintain between a natural *sacredness* [emphasis added] that would be ‘pagan’, even Graeco-Christian, and *holiness* [emphasis added] . . . of (Jewish) law, before or under the Roman religion.”¹⁶³ In a certain sense, this Levinasian sacred is not totally unlike Patočka’s orgiastic sacred with its relation to the magical and the demonic, that which Levinas distinguishes from the Jewish notion of holy (*qdsh*).¹⁶⁴

I have always asked myself if holiness, that is, separation or purity, the essence without admixture that can be called Spirit and which animates the Jewish tradition—or to which the Jewish tradition aspires—can dwell in a world that has not been desacralized. I have asked myself—and that is the real question—whether the world is sufficiently desacralized to receive such purity. The sacred is in fact the half light in which the sorcery the Jewish tradition abhors flourishes.¹⁶⁵

Levinas sets up an opposition between “holiness . . . to which the Jewish tradition aspires” and “a world that has not been desacralized.” This world provides the sacred (*sacré*) ground (because it is not sufficiently desacralized) “in which the sorcery the Jewish tradition abhors flourishes.” Levinas then spends considerable time explaining how sorcery is

¹⁶⁰ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 6.

¹⁶¹ Derrida distinguishes between this essay and “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” and acknowledges, while not elaborating any further, that a “set of questions are [there] approached from another point of view.” Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 4n4.

¹⁶² One can find a description of this distinction, for example, in John Llewelyn, “Who or What or Whot?” in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics and Religion*, ed. J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008), 79. For the sake of clarity, *la sainteté* is the feminine form of the word and is sometimes rendered *le saint*, which is the masculine form of the word. In either case, *la sainteté* or *le saint*, “the holy” is intended as opposed to “the sacred” (*le sacré*).

¹⁶³ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 54.

¹⁶⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 137-160.

¹⁶⁵ Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 141.

condemned in Jewish tradition, and likens it to “challenging the Assembly on High,”¹⁶⁶ and “the desacralization of the sacred.”¹⁶⁷ But if sorcery (which is evil) is the “desacralization of the sacred” then that means that the sacred (*sacré*) is a “good” in this usage. This is borne out when Levinas goes on to call the “real sacred” (as opposed to, presumably, a “pseudo-sacred”) “holiness” and “the service of the Most High.”¹⁶⁸ However, Levinas does not refer to the holy (*sainteté*) with any sort of ambivalence; the holy is that which unequivocally relates to the divine, by which is meant the God of Judaism. The sacred *could* have its origin in the holy and become a perverted Judaism, but it is usually a reference to a perversion that is foreign to Judaism: “Peoples perverted to such a degree that the earth vomits them. Sorcery, then, would be a phenomenon of perversions, absolutely foreign to Judaism itself. It is the sacred (*le sacré*) of others!”¹⁶⁹ All other gods and mythologies are idolatry where “Jewish monotheism does not exalt a sacred power, a *numen* triumphing over other numinous powers but still participating in their clandestine and mysterious life. . . . Monotheism marks a break with a certain conception of the Sacred.”¹⁷⁰ This conception of the sacred distinguished from the God of Jewish monotheism “as regards the Divine . . . is merely atheism.”¹⁷¹ In other words, since there is only one God (monotheism) the sacred applied to anything else represents rejection of (or lack of belief in) the one God and, hence, is atheism.

The Judaic distinction between the sacred and the holy (as followed by Levinas) finds a similar echo in the Greek New Testament terms for holy: *hierós*, and *hagios*. *Hierós* “on the one side denotes the power of the divine sphere, on the other the sanctity of what belongs to deity, whether by nature, primal law, or custom,” and “is the most common sacral and cultic

¹⁶⁶ “They challenge the Assembly on High” in Hebrew is *makhishin famalia shel maala* in which, Levinas notes, “one would find the letters *k, sh, f, m* forming the word *keshafim* (vowels are not taken into account!), which means sorcery.” Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 147.

¹⁶⁷ Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 147.

¹⁶⁸ Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 147.

¹⁶⁹ Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 144.

¹⁷⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 14.

¹⁷¹ Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 15. Right here is a distinction with Derrida who “passes for an atheist.” It is improbable that Derrida would use the term “merely atheism” in so dismissive a fashion.

term in the Greek world.”¹⁷² The Septuagint, “feeling the pagan sense of the term”¹⁷³ (*hierós*), renders the Hebrew *qdsh* with *hagios*. Similarly the New Testament “shows that Christianity shares the LXX shunning of this sacral term of paganism.”¹⁷⁴ A curious exception to this is 2 Timothy 3:15 where the Scriptures, by which commentators often infer the *Old Testament* Scriptures,¹⁷⁵ are referred to as *hierá*, that is, Holy (*heirá*) Scriptures. One would have thought that the author of Timothy would have preferred *hagios*, the word used for the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:14), if *all* that was meant was the Hebrew Scriptures. In any event, generally, at least, the Bible (both New and Old Testaments) implies a distinction between what is sacred (*hagios*) in both the Judaic and Christian sense, and what is considered sacred (*hierós*) by all *others* (non-Christians and non-Jews).¹⁷⁶

In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida appears to disagree with Levinas’s understanding of the sacred (the apparent dichotomy suggested by *le sacré* and *la sainteté*), and in this regard refers to Heidegger in “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas.”¹⁷⁷ The first reference to the sacred in this essay sees Derrida objecting to Levinas’s prioritising of speech over writing, pointing out the incoherence of Levinas’s stance with the question: “[How] could Hebraism belittle the letter, in praise of which Levinas writes so well?”¹⁷⁸

Later in the essay, Derrida prefers Heidegger’s understanding of the sacred to the Levinasian position. Derrida maintains that Heidegger’s “site” of the sacred “is not a *pagan cult*” as it is not “an empirical Here but always an illic: for Heidegger, as for the Jew and the Poet.”¹⁷⁹ This “illic” refers to a place but not a presence. It has the connotation of “over

¹⁷² Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), s.v. “*Hierós*.”

¹⁷³ Bromiley, s.v. “*Hierós*.”

¹⁷⁴ Bromiley, s.v. “*Hierós*.”

¹⁷⁵ Bromiley, s.v. “*Hierós*.”

¹⁷⁶ Bromiley, s.v. “*Hagios*.”

¹⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 97-192.

¹⁷⁸ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 127.

¹⁷⁹ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 182.

there.” Derrida points out that “the Site is never a given proximity but a promised one.”¹⁸⁰ Heidegger’s “thinking of Being” does not parallel Levinas’s “pagan cult of the Site,” because “the Sacred of which it speaks *belongs* neither to religion in general, nor to a particular theology, and thus cannot be determined by any history of religion.”¹⁸¹ In order to speak of God or gods, one must presuppose the sacred, or the notion of divinity or deity. This is true, Derrida points out, whether one speaks from a position of faith or atheism, since divinity, deity and the sacred are not God, but indicate the space within which God can be conceived:

That the gods and God cannot be indicated except in the Space of the Sacred and in the light of the deity, is at once the *limit* and the *wellspring* of finite-Being as history. Limit, because divinity is *not* God. In a sense it is nothing. . . . Wellspring, because this anticipation as a thought of Being (of the existent God) always *sees* God *coming*, opens the possibility (the eventuality) of an encounter with God and of a dialogue with God.¹⁸²

The reason that Levinas’s critique fails is that *both* his negative concept of the (pagan) sacred (*le sacré*) and his positive concept of the (Judaic) holy (*la sainteté*) are contained in Heidegger’s understanding of the sacred. The site for sacred paganism to be thought is the same site for the Holy God of Israel to be thought. This notion of the sacred that is more originary than God and promissory of the coming of God (or, perhaps, in Derrida’s thinking, the wholly other) has the advantage of avoiding the binary opposites that onto-theological understandings of the sacred—sacred/profane; sacred/common; sacred/secular; sacred/pagan; sacred/demonic and so forth—inevitably postulate.

It is with this idea of locating the sacred in a space that is prior to any dichotomous allusions that I turn to Derrida’s essay “Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” Direct discussion on the sacred or mention of the sacred in the work of Derrida is generally sparse. This essay, however, is an exception. It contains over thirty occurrences of the word “sacred”¹⁸³ and if one were to include closely associated words (such as, “sacrosanct” and “holy”)¹⁸⁴ then one could double this number. The title contains

¹⁸⁰ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 182.

¹⁸¹ Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 182.

¹⁸² Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” 182.

¹⁸³ See Jacques Derrida, *Religion: Cultural Memory in the Present*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 3, 8, 9, 15, 17, 21, 23, 24, 29, 31, 33, 34, 36, 44, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 56, 58, 62, 63, 64, 65.

¹⁸⁴ For example (this is not a comprehensive list and does not include those instances where these words occur in close juxtaposition with “sacred”), Derrida, *Religion*, 5, 6, 47, 48, 54, 58.

allusions to three separate works¹⁸⁵ which should be borne in mind in any analysis:

1) Hegel's *Glauben und Wissen* (that is, *Faith and Knowledge*);¹⁸⁶ 2) Henri Bergson's *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*);¹⁸⁷ and 3) Kant's *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*—a notable English translation being *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.¹⁸⁸

It is evident that Derrida diverges somewhat from Kant's title: "... Derrida writes 'at the limits' [*aux limites*], and not 'within the limits' [*dans les limites*]" ¹⁸⁹ Also, the fusion of titles in Derrida's subtitle results in the deletion of Bergson's "morality" and the addition of quotes to the word "religion," resulting in "The Two Sources of 'Religion'" This deletion of "morality" suggests a possible conclusion: Derrida does not subscribe to the notion that both morality and religion should be linked to the same "two sources." It also hints at more specific objections, possibly to Bergson's understanding of Kantian morality as heteronomous and duty-based, and to institutional religions generally. The initial point to be derived is that if the sacred is located in a religious tradition (and religious traditions do have a great deal to say about what is sacred), Derrida would be unable to regard this "sacred" as sacred.

Turning, then, to the sacred in this essay, Derrida asks:

[C]an a discourse on religion be dissociated from a discourse on salvation: which is to say, on the holy, the sacred, the safe and the sound, the unscathed <*indemne*>,¹⁹⁰ the immune (*sacer*, *sanctus*, *heilig*, holy, and their alleged equivalents in so many languages)? And salvation, is it

¹⁸⁵ I first read of these three titles constituting Derrida's title "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in John P. Manoussakis, "The Revelation According to Jacques Derrida," in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005), 310. Of course, Derrida does explicitly mention Kant's and Bergson's titles in his text. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 77.

¹⁸⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (New York: State University of New York Press, 1977).

¹⁸⁷ Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudsley Brereton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

¹⁸⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George di Giavanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁸⁹ Victor Kal, "Review of Acts of Religion," *Ars Disputandi* 2, (2002), under "3 Faith and Knowledge," <http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000080/article.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2011).

¹⁹⁰ Samuel Weber, the translator, notes: "the use of angle brackets <> indicates interpolations of the translator." Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 42n1. In this case, "unscathed" is Weber's translation for the French, "*indemne*." See Jacques Derrida, "Foi et Savoir: Les deux sources de la 'religion' aux limites de la simple raison," in *La Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 9-86.

necessarily redemption, before or after evil, fault or sin? Now where is evil <le mal>? Where is evil today, at present? Suppose that there was an exemplary and unprecedented figure of evil, even of that radical evil which seems to mark our time as no other. Is it by identifying this evil that one will accede to what might be the figure or promise of salvation for our time, and thus the singularity of the religious whose return is proclaimed in every newspaper?¹⁹¹

There are several terms, often perceived as representing the essence of “salvation,” that Derrida mentions in parallel. The *point* of religion, in this sense, is to ensure one’s safety, for which reason adherents of particular religions search for some or other association with the holy and the sacred (that which is undefiled, unsullied, untainted, pure and “safe and sound”). The holy and the sacred could be negatively described as the space where evil is not. And yet, “our time,” says Derrida, is marked by evil, even “radical evil.” The term is Kant’s, the adjective “radical” (German: *radikal*) referring to the root, source, origin or ground.

Derrida also refers to *radical extirpation*¹⁹² (literally “to uproot the root”). He further labels Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* as “a book on radical evil,”¹⁹³ which leads to the inevitable conclusion that Derrida’s essay has a significant concern with radical evil (in view of a third of his title being borrowed from Kant) and its relation to religion. Perhaps, Derrida is saying (implying?) that evil at its root is fundamentally religious or, maybe, that religion at its root is evil. It is also worth reiterating the deletion of “morality” in his appropriation of Bergson’s title. Derrida does say: “The possibility of **radical evil**¹⁹⁴ both destroys and institutes the religious.”¹⁹⁵ The idea is that “the possibility of radical evil” causes a religion (for example) to arise, but also “institutes” the germ of its destruction. Religion arises in order to *combat* the threat (“possibility”) of evil, but that this does not immunise this very religion from the evil that it strives to mitigate.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 42-43. This entire quotation is emphasised in the source. The first part of “Faith and Knowledge” (pages 42-60) is written in emphasised text while the latter part of the essay (pages 60-101) is written in a normal de-emphasised manner. I have written quotations from this essay without emphasis, since to include the emphasis only causes dissonance in my own text and cannot represent the distinction that Derrida indicates over 60 pages.

¹⁹² Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 43.

¹⁹³ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 77.

¹⁹⁴ The text is bolded in the source, probably to distinguish this emphasis from the italics of the opening 19 pages of the essay.

¹⁹⁵ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 100.

¹⁹⁶ It is worth reiterating that my concern is to outline Derrida’s relation to religion and the sacred, and not to defend or explicate the sustainability of his reading of Kant.

Coupled to this “radical evil” is the idea of a “return of religion,” which is described as “machine-like.”¹⁹⁷ This “machine-like” metaphor is a reference to the “return of religion” in *our* time, and would be applied with great difficulty to earlier eras. The religion that returns is not purely in the realm of religious fundamentalism, although this surely is present, but also the secular atheism of modernity. Derrida suggests that one is “blind to the phenomenon . . . of the ‘return of the religious’ *today* if one continued to oppose so naively Reason *and* Religion, Critique or Science *and* Religion, technoscientific Reason *and* Religion.”¹⁹⁸ These dichotomies do not exclude one another as they appear to presume, but are intrinsic to one another.

Religious fundamentalism is therefore at the same time a supremely rational, hyper-critical phenomenon. At the opposite side of the spectrum, reason transforms itself into religion as soon as it yields to the tempting thought that it might finally leave religion behind. Thus modern knowledge-technology should be regarded as a kind of religion, if not a form of mysticism.¹⁹⁹

“How then to think—within the limits of reason alone—a religion which . . . would be effectively universal” and “would no longer be restricted to a paradigm that was Christian or even Abrahamic?”²⁰⁰

Since religion is complicit in the formation of so many binaries, all of which Derrida is concerned to deconstruct, it is necessary to search for the sacred in a “place” that precedes polarising dichotomies. Derrida notes a “chain,” with the initial point of departure being the German word “*heilig*,” whose “semantic history seems to resist” the Levinasian dichotomy of sacred (pagan) and holy (Judaic purity). *Heilig*, in this understanding, would precede ontotheologies, religions and polarising dichotomies. It gives an appreciation of the sacred (as “revealability”) that is anterior to any revelatory event and “hence independent of all

¹⁹⁷ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 57.

¹⁹⁸ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 65. See also Manoussakis, 314.

¹⁹⁹ Kal, under “3 Faith and Knowledge.”

²⁰⁰ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 53. Derrida notes a concept that he calls “Globalatinization” which is a combination of “Latin” and “Globalization” that is not universal but is “a process of universalization” and is “Christian, to be sure.” It is something that is not only Latin but also Anglo-American. At once political and imperialistic, it speaks in a kind of religious meta-language: “*Religion* circulates the world, one might say, like an *English word* that has been to Rome and taken a detour to the United States. Well beyond its strictly capitalist or politico-military figure, a hyper-imperialist appropriation has been underway for centuries. It imposes itself in a particularly palpable manner within the conceptual apparatus of international law and global political rhetoric. Wherever this apparatus dominates, it articulates itself through a discourse on religion.” Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 66-67.

religion.”²⁰¹ In other words, there is an idea of the sacred (*heilig*) that is before religion and before binaries. This is “another way” that is beyond or before all of these problematic dichotomies.

The point here is that an examination of the actual word “sacred” in Derrida’s works tends, if anything, to indicate that which is *not* sacred to Derrida. This is because whether the sacred is examined with regard to its biblical understandings (Old and New Testaments), its use in Judaism (even in the work of Levinas), in Western Christianity or even in secular modernity, it is always placed in a binary opposition, or at least, implies such an opposition: sacred/profane; *qodesh/hol*; *hagios/hierós*; *la sainteté/le sacré*; reason/religion and so forth. But notice that each of the second terms of these binaries, from the perspective of those who initiate them, is the negative term (the first term being the “true sacred,” as it were). Derrida has no interest in prioritising one term over the other.

Derrida refers to a “third place” which he describes as “a certain desert . . . which makes possible, opens, hollows or infinitizes the other” and a “fiduciary ‘link’” that “precedes all determinate community, all positive religion, every onto-anthropo-theological horizon. It would link pure singularities prior to any social or political determinations prior to all intersubjectivity, prior even to the opposition between the sacred (or the holy) and the profane.”²⁰² Derrida is seeking for a contentless abstraction (hence the notion of a “desert”) that “can thereby open the way to everything from which it withdraws.”²⁰³ At this point, Derrida turns—“for pedagogical or rhetorical reasons”²⁰⁴—to the messianic and *khôra*. These “two sources, these two fountains or these two tracks that are still invisible in the desert”²⁰⁵ can be aligned with *différance* and, I would like to suggest, provide a window into what, in a certain sense, could be called sacred in Derrida’s thought. The most simple reason for this is that they are “prior . . . to the opposition between the sacred (or the holy) and the profane.” There is a third place that provides a space for the sacred, and this idea of the sacred is not defined in terms of a dichotomy. This idea of the sacred is related to the other, and can be approached via the messianic and *khôra* (at least in the context of Derrida’s essay “Faith and

²⁰¹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 54.

²⁰² Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 55.

²⁰³ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 55.

²⁰⁴ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 55.

²⁰⁵ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 55.

Knowledge”). The messianic is related to an expectation and hope for the coming of the other, while *khôra* provides space for the other. I will return to both of these concepts in more detail later, but first I will consider the place of the other in Derrida’s work.

1.2. The Other

Jonathan Roffe notes the significance of the other in Derrida’s thought:

Derrida tries to pursue the eradication of alterity through the history of philosophy in all of its multifarious manifestations. The relation to the other, that is, concerns the other person but also the other meanings of a text, the other ways of seeing things, other races, other genders, another time (such as the future, the messianic), other languages, other traditions, and so forth. . . . Derrida’s work, considered in this way, has, since the very earliest texts, been travelling down the side-streets of Western thought, well off the monotonous motorway, drawn on by the ethical demand to open itself up to the other, to all the others.²⁰⁶

I will examine the notion of the other, or the wholly other, via the phrase *tout autre est tout autre* (transliterated, but not necessarily translated, “every other is wholly other”²⁰⁷), and how this phrase is defined in chapter four of *The Gift of Death*, which carries the phrase as its title. The reason that this will be helpful in moving toward the sacred in Derrida is because the wholly other has been equated with God (in Kierkegaard, for example), which then would seem to provide a sacred place for the wholly other (it is deified). While it is true that Derrida has significant regard for (maybe even to the point of sacralising) the wholly other, I also think that Derrida spends some time showing that the wholly other is *not* God, at least not a defined God.

When Jan Patočka ties the sacred to magical religions and mysticism, his concern is for European responsibility, by which he also means *Christian* responsibility. In his analysis of Patočka, Derrida identifies two “*heterogeneous types of secret*.”²⁰⁸ 1) “The secret of historicity—that which [historical humanity] must admit to because it concerns [their] very

²⁰⁶ Jonathan Roffe, “Ethics,” in *Understanding Derrida*, ed. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Price (New York: Continuum, 2004), 44.

²⁰⁷ Kas Saghafi notes diverse English translations of *tout autre est tout autre* by different translators of Derrida’s work. The following is a pertinent sampling: “every other is altogether other” (Peggy Kamuf in *Spectres of Marx*), “any other is totally other” (John P. Leavey in *Sauf Le Nom*), “Every Other is Completely Other” (Thomas du Toit in *Aporias*), “the altogether other, and every other (one) is every (bit) other” (George Collins in *Politics of Friendship*), “every other is every other other, is altogether other” (Eric Prenowitz in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*), “every other is utterly other” (Samuel Weber in *Religion*), “the entirely other is entirely other” (Patrick Mensah in *Monoligualism of the Other*). Kas Saghafi, *Apparitions—Of Derrida’s Other* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 172-73n27.

²⁰⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 8.

responsibility;”²⁰⁹ 2) “The secret of orgiastic mystery that the history of responsibility has to break with.”²¹⁰

This becoming responsible, that is, this becoming-historical of humankind seems to be intimately tied to the properly Christian event of *another secret*, or more precisely of a mystery the *mysterium tremendum*: the terrifying mystery, the dread, fear, and trembling of the Christian in the experience of the sacrificial gift.²¹¹

This is amplified and defined: “This trembling seizes one at the moment of becoming a person, and the person can only become what it is in being paralyzed [*transie*], in its very singularity, by the gaze of God.”²¹² There is a movement from the external to the internal, since God gazes at us internally. This gaze of God is at the same time the *holy* gaze of God (since it is God’s gaze). Derrida ties God’s gaze to the gift of death, which is evidenced in the idea of sacrifice (for instance, that of Jesus for humanity).²¹³ Derrida observes with regard to the *mysterium tremendum*:

The gift made to me by God to the extent that he [*sic*] holds me in his [*sic*] gaze and in his [*sic*] hands while at the same time remaining inaccessible to me, the terribly dissymmetrical gift of the *mysterium tremendum*, only allows me to respond and only rouses me to the responsibility it gives me by making a gift of death [*en me donnant le mort*], giving the secret of death, a new experience of death.²¹⁴

Later, Derrida adds: “A secret *always* makes you tremble.”²¹⁵ This trembling is related to not knowing—“we tremble from not knowing.”²¹⁶ But there is a doubling of the reason for trembling. Firstly, “I tremble before what exceeds my seeing and knowing,”²¹⁷ but also, “[o]ne doesn’t know *why one trembles*.”²¹⁸ Why does fear make us tremble? “This

²⁰⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 8.

²¹⁰ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 8.

²¹¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 8.

²¹² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 8.

²¹³ The more intriguing backdrop (and the sacrifice more extensively examined by Derrida) is in the Abraham/Isaac narrative where the gift is interrupted at the moment it is given (Abraham slays Isaac as his hand is stayed). What Abraham does is purely in the sight of God, since Isaac is not let into the secret.

²¹⁴ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 34-35.

²¹⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 54.

²¹⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 55.

²¹⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 55.

²¹⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 56.

symptomatology is as enigmatic as tears.”²¹⁹ I know that when I weep, I am sad, but why do tears come to my eyes when I am sad? “What does *the body mean (to say)* by trembling or crying, presuming one can speak here of the body, of saying or meaning, and of rhetoric?”²²⁰ There is here a curious detour related to significations and the way our bodies react or “speak” by way of response. Derrida does not pursue this but does note that the “final cause . . . can be called God or death.”²²¹ The reason we cry or tremble, in an ultimate sense, is because we are faced with death or have lost a loved one. Thus “the gift of death” makes us tremble, but Derrida also notes the relation of our trembling and weeping to God, since “God is the cause of the *mysterium tremendum*.”²²²

The notion of “trembling,” derived most obviously from Kierkegaard’s examination of Philippians 2:12 (discussed below), is also somewhat suggestive of Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*—translated from the German title *Das Heilige*, where the word “*heilige*” could be translated either “holy” or “sacred.” Otto connects that which is holy or the “numinous” (from the Latin *numen* meaning divinity) with the *mysterium tremendum*. The most cursory examination of the table of contents of Otto’s book reveals that the *tremendum* is related to ideas of “awefulness,” “overpoweringness” and “urgency;” and the *mysterium* to that of the “wholly other” (which also suggests parallels with Derrida’s *tout autre*). Otto also examines “the element of fascination”—*fascinans*—which describes the *mysterium* not only as instilling awe, but also as alluring—something that captivates us.²²³

For Otto, the *mysterium* or mystery is not merely something that happens to be a mystery to us in the sense of ignorance, something we could in principle know or understand if we took the trouble. That would merely be a “problem” that could be solved, not a mystery in the sense of the *mysterium tremendum*. Otto sets “the numinous object in contrast not only to everything wonted and familiar . . . but finally to the world itself . . . that which is above the whole world-order.”²²⁴ He contrasts mysticism “with all that is of the nature of this world” and “with Being itself and all that ‘is,’” and culminates by calling it “that which is

²¹⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 56.

²²⁰ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 56.

²²¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 56.

²²² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 56.

²²³ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), v.

²²⁴ Otto, 29.

nothing.”²²⁵ While these descriptions seem to produce a purely negative theology by negating a comparison with anything that can be humanly conceived, Otto insists that “Mysticism at the same time retains the *positive quality* of the ‘wholly other’ as a very living factor in its over-brimming religious emotion.”²²⁶ Otto’s “wholly other” has a positive “feeling content”—“something of whose special character we can *feel*, without being able to give it clear conceptual expression.”²²⁷ The “feeling content” points to a *wholly subjective* experience of the other that cannot be shared. It is a secret. This hints at what Derrida appears to critique in the notion of the wholly other as God.

Derrida suggests that what makes us tremble in the face of the *mysterium tremendum* is the *dissymmetry* between the “gift of infinite love” and “my finitude, responsibility as culpability, sin, salvation, repentance, and sacrifice.”²²⁸ Derrida acknowledges Kierkegaard’s “implicit and indirect”²²⁹ reference to Philippians where Paul admonishes the disciples: “Wherefore my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with *fear and trembling* [emphasis added].”²³⁰ Derrida adds the following explication:

The disciples are asked to work toward their salvation not in the presence (*parousia*) but in the absence (*apousia*) of the master: without either seeing or knowing without hearing the law or reasons for the law. . . . [But if] Paul says “adieu”²³¹ and absents himself as he asks [or orders, since one doesn’t ask for obedience] them to obey . . . it is because God is himself [*sic*], absent, hidden and silent, separate, secret, at the moment he [*sic*] has to be obeyed. God doesn’t give his [*sic*] reasons Otherwise he [*sic*] wouldn’t be God, we wouldn’t be dealing with the Other as God . . . if he [*sic*] were to speak to us all the time without any secrets, he [*sic*] wouldn’t be the other, we would share a type of homogeneity.²³²

²²⁵ Otto, 29-30.

²²⁶ Otto, 30.

²²⁷ Otto, 30.

²²⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 56-57.

²²⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 57.

²³⁰ Phil. 2:12 (AV).

²³¹ Derrida gives three possible meanings for *adieu*: 1) *Adieu* can signify “hello,” a salutation at the moment of meeting; 2) “The salutation or benediction given at the moment of separation . . . sometimes forever . . . at the moment of death;” 3) “The *à-dieu*, for God or before God and before anything else and every relation to the other, in a wholly other *adieu*.” Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 58. On the surface, Paul’s *adieu* would appear to be the second of these, but Derrida’s commentary seems to invoke the third: *à-dieu* (before God).

²³² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 57-58.

But Derrida doesn't use the word "sacred" rather he refers to a "secret." This phenomenology, this experience of trembling when under the gaze of God, this dissymmetry between the infinite God and the finite self, this fear when confronted by God's command, this *unknowing* when faced by the wholly other, is something that can only be experienced in secret.

I now return to the phrase *tout autre est tout autre*, which, on the surface, appears to be a tautology; but it is one that Derrida also refers to as a "heterotautology."²³³ The reason for this is that the meanings of the words vary according to their grammatical form. So *tout* (the first one) is an "indefinite pronominal adjective"²³⁴ (some, some-one, some other one) and the [second *tout* is] an adverb of quantity (totally, absolutely, radically, infinitely other).²³⁵ The "first *autre* becomes a noun [if the first *tout* is an indefinite pronominal adjective], and the second, in all probability, an adjective or attribute."²³⁶ Hence, the first *tout* describes which other is meant, while the second describes the nature of that other. Alternatively, it could be a tautology: "the two *autres* are finally repeated in the *monotony of a tautology that wins out after all* [emphasis added] . . . the other is the other, that is always so, the alterity of the other is the alterity of the other."²³⁷

I will return to this tautology that "wins out after all" because I believe the tautological nature of this phrase, although apparently side-lined, is what eventually provides a startling resolution to Derrida's arguments. Also, it is crucial that one recall that this chapter concludes Derrida's essay (*The Gift of Death*), which has thus far been dominated by Jan Patočka's critique of historic Christianity, a critique that Derrida by and large appears to have endorsed. There is no reason to presume that Derrida has softened in his critique of (historic) Christianity in these concluding pages, quite the contrary.

Tout autre est tout autre presents at least two significantly different understandings. The one derives from the idea that the "wholly other" is a term reserved for God (in that God

²³³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 83.

²³⁴ That is, it is a relative adjective that describes the pronoun (*autre*), hence one has "every other" which, as Derrida points out, could be specific, and mean "each other." In any event, *tout* describes which other is meant.

²³⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 82.

²³⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 83.

²³⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 83.

is “*infinitely other*”),²³⁸ while the second understanding “attributes this infinite alterity of the wholly other to every other . . . each living thing human or not.”²³⁹ This latter idea is preferred by Levinas, who nevertheless would like to distinguish “between the infinite alterity of God and the ‘same’ infinite alterity of every human.”²⁴⁰ For Derrida, neither Levinas nor Kierkegaard (whose exposition of the Abraham/Isaac narrative is of particular interest to Derrida) can distinguish adequately between the religious and the ethical.²⁴¹

If one is to confuse the meaning of the wholly other between meaning God or *any* other, then the borders between the ethical (our relation to one another) and the religious (our relation to God) is inevitably blurred. From an ethical point of view, Abraham is rightly called a murderer, and if a father today were to sacrifice his son on some mountain, then it is clear that “everything is organized to insure this man would be condemned by civilized society.”²⁴² However, Derrida notes that society has instituted laws and economies that the same society that would condemn this man

puts to death or . . . allows to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children . . . without any moral or legal tribunal ever being considered competent to judge such a sacrifice, the sacrifice of the other to avoid being sacrificed oneself. Not only does such a society participate in this incalculable sacrifice, it actually organizes it.²⁴³

This does not even speak of wars, which are fought between “irreconcilable fellow worshipers of the religions of the Book.”²⁴⁴ Do the protagonists of these wars, asks Derrida, “not fight in order to appropriate the secret as the sign of their covenant with God, and impose its order on the other, who becomes for his [*sic*] part nothing more than a murderer?”²⁴⁵ The dilemma is the wholly other (God) who demands absolute obedience (in secret) to a command that involves the sacrificing of all others.

And again, Derrida reiterates the nature—“the trembling”—of the formula *tout autre est tout autre*, in the sense of replacing the “wholly other” with God: “Every other (one) is

²³⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 83.

²³⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 83.

²⁴⁰ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 84.

²⁴¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 84.

²⁴² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 85.

²⁴³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 86.

²⁴⁴ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 86-87.

²⁴⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 87.

God” or “God is every (bit) other.”²⁴⁶ He suggests that, in this sense, *tout autre est tout autre* is a kind of *shibboleth* “a secret formula such as can be uttered only in a certain way in a certain language.”²⁴⁷ It “functions as a secret within one’s so-called natural or mother tongue.”²⁴⁸ All others who don’t understand this tongue, foreigners, are excluded (from the secret) and sacrificed in the name of the wholly other (God).

Derrida now turns to a text referred to by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*: Matt. 6:18.²⁴⁹ The key phrase is “[the father] sees in secret.”²⁵⁰ Derrida notes the dissymmetry in that God sees me, but I do not see God:

God looks at me and I don’t see him [*sic*], and it is on the basis of this gaze that singles me out . . . that my responsibility comes into being. . . . But not in the sense of a (Kantian) autonomy . . . rather in the heteronomy of and “it’s my lookout” even when I can’t see anything, don’t know anything, and can take no initiative, there where I cannot pre-empt by my own initiative whatever is commanding me to make decisions, decisions that will nevertheless be mine, and which I alone will have to answer for.²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 87.

²⁴⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 88.

²⁴⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 88.

²⁴⁹ Derrida does not actually identify the chapter and verse, possibly because Kierkegaard doesn’t. However, nor does Derrida actually quote the part of the verse that Kierkegaard does. Kierkegaard quotes Matt. 6:17-18a: “When thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou be not seen of men to fast.” Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 121. Derrida, however, is concerned with the phrase in Matt. 6:18 that immediately follows: “thy father which seeth in secret,” which he quotes in Latin (*videre in abscondito*—“sees in secret”) and Greek (*en to krypto blepein*—“in the cryptic sees”). Later Derrida calls Kierkegaard’s reference to “your father who sees in secret” as “barely veiled” and “the allusion:” “When Kierkegaard-de Silentio makes a *barely veiled* [emphasis added] reference to the Gospel of Matthew [Kierkegaard’s reference is made in the following way: “In the Sermon on the Mount it is said . . .” Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 121], the allusion [emphasis added] to ‘your father who sees in secret (*qui videt in abscondito / ho blepon en to krypto*)’ echoes on more than one stave of the scale.” Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 90.

²⁵⁰ Derrida analyses both the Latin (the Vulgate) and the Greek text. In this he distinguishes between the chosen Latin translation for “secret”: *absconditus*—meaning “the hidden, the secret, the mysterious . . . that which is lost from sight;” and the Greek: *krypto*—meaning concealed, cryptic, secret and so forth, but significantly, for Derrida, “the cryptic has come to enlarge the field of secrecy beyond the nonvisible toward whatever resists deciphering, the secret as illegible or undecipherable rather than invisible.” With this in mind, Derrida suggests that the invisible can be translated in two ways: 1) Something can be invisible in that it is kept out of sight. The object remains in the realm of visibility, but is hidden, e.g. a cache of nuclear explosives hidden in underground silos or the organs of my body which are invisible in the sense that they are concealed from sight, but nevertheless are of the order of visibility (the examples are Derrida’s); 2) “But there is also absolute invisibility . . . that refers to whatever falls outside the register of sight, namely the sonorous, the musical, the vocal or phonic . . . but also the tactile or the odoriferous.” Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 90.

²⁵¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 91.

This dissymmetry means that the other sees me, but I don't see the other in me. This notion leads Derrida back to the thinking of Patočka, who "describes the coming of Christian subjectivity and the repression of Platonism through recourse to a figure that faces us, one might say, with a sacrifice that is inscribed within the dissymmetry of looks that cannot be exchanged."²⁵² This is done literally: "*Tremendum*, for responsibility is now vested not in a humanly comprehensible essence of goodness and unity but, rather, in an inscrutable relation to the absolute highest being in whose hands we are not externally, internally."²⁵³ It is at this point that, in the Christian faith, "the Good" ceases to be a philosophical idea, but rather "personal Goodness." The reason for this is that from the perspective of a particular Christian, the *Mysterium Tremendum* (the gaze of the wholly other: God) is experienced *internally and therefore secretly* (nobody else knows).

Derrida notes that this gaze cannot be exchanged²⁵⁴—an idea that simply means that because I don't see the gaze that sees me, I cannot "look" back, and therefore, there is no "exchange" of gazes. There is also a deeper significance that has to do with the pure gift that cannot be exchanged, one that avoids all economy. This could direct one down a detour related to the gift of death, which also escapes economy, because a dead (sacrificed) person does not have the ability to repay. Derrida is considering the gift of death in terms of the sacrifice (Abraham sacrificing Isaac) that is demanded by the gaze of God. The gaze "situates originary culpability and original sin; it is the essence of responsibility" and this responsibility "sets in train the search for salvation through sacrifice."²⁵⁵

Sacrifice is further examined with regard to Patočka and the notion of the "being-toward-death . . . the apprehension of the gift of death, or death as an offering" and Derrida's idea of the "*economy of sacrifice*."²⁵⁶ This is more precisely explained with regard to Kierkegaard, where the sacrifice of Isaac is "re-Christianized" or "pre-Christianized" via the Gospel of Matthew: "For he (God the Father) sees in secret and recognizes distress and

²⁵² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 93.

²⁵³ Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 107, quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 93.

²⁵⁴ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 93.

²⁵⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 94.

²⁵⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 94.

counts the tears and forgets nothing”²⁵⁷ and “thy father which seeth in secret shall reward thee.”²⁵⁸ So Abraham sacrifices Isaac without hope, but “*in this instant . . .* God gives him back his son and decides by sovereign decision, by an absolute gift, to reinscribe sacrifice within an economy by means of what thenceforth resembles a reward.”²⁵⁹ It is via renunciation that Abraham is rewarded:

Abraham renounces all sense and all property—that is where the responsibility of absolute duty begins. Abraham is in a relation of nonexchange with God, he is in secret since he doesn’t speak to God²⁶⁰ and expects neither response nor reward from him [*sic*]. The response and hence responsibility always risk what they cannot avoid appealing to *in return*, namely recompense and retribution. They risk the exchange that they should at the same time expect and fail to count on, hope for yet exclude.²⁶¹

Abraham “gains or wins” in that he has renounced the life of his son (with no hope of recompense); in “this instant of absolute renunciation”²⁶² God returns the very thing Abraham renounces. “It is given back to him because he has renounced calculation.”²⁶³ Abraham offers Isaac (the gift of death) for free (he expects nothing back) and thereby renounces the economy of give and take. Hence, Abraham is the knight of faith.

Derrida now turns to Matthew 6 (derived, as previously noted, from an allusion in *Fear and Trembling*). This he does by focusing on the thrice repeated phrase “then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”²⁶⁴ This entire passage is centred on justice “and especially what we might call economic justice: alms-giving, wages, debt, laying

²⁵⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, vol. 6 of *Fear and Trembling, and Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 120, quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 94-95.

²⁵⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 95.

²⁵⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 95.

²⁶⁰ Abraham does not speak (save for the single response to Isaac). This is because he is in absolute responsibility. Obedience to the absolute other does not require any more communication. Abraham’s silence is vital for him to be a knight of faith. In a sense, to speak is to argue in order to get God to change God’s mind. No such debate is possible. One should also keep silence with respect to others (Isaac or Sarah, for example) in that any conversation with them would be an attempt to be “talked out of it.”

²⁶¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 96.

²⁶² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 96.

²⁶³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 96.

²⁶⁴ Matt. 6:4, 6, 18 (NIV).

up of treasures. Now the line demarcating celestial from terrestrial economy is what allows one to situate the correct place of the heart.”²⁶⁵ In this regard Jesus teaches:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where treasure is, there will your heart be also.²⁶⁶

This notion of “celestial capital” as “an economic discourse on the site or placement of the heart” is both a “cardiotopology” and an “ophthalmology.”²⁶⁷ The celestial treasure is invisible to corrupted and corruptible eyes of flesh: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single [more usually translated “healthy”—French: *sain*], thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness, how great is that darkness.”²⁶⁸ In this imagery the eye is the “source of visibility . . . it gives light from the inside.”²⁶⁹

Derrida notes again that this passage is to do with justice, but it is also placed in an economy: “The kingdom of heaven is promised to the poor in spirit . . . along with them who mourn, the meek . . .” and so on (Derrida gives the whole list of beatitudes from Matthew 5). All of these are “promised remuneration, a reward, a token, a good salary, a great reward *in heaven*.” Hence, “real heavenly treasure is constituted . . . on the basis of the price paid to those who have been able to raise themselves above the earthly or literal justice of the Scribes and Pharisees, the men of letters, of the body and of the earth.” This notion of the literal, the strict conformity to a written letter (which can be seen) is set in contrast to the unseen, the heart, and those who rise above it (certainly not the Scribes or the Pharisees): Derrida states (reflecting the biblical text): “If your justice does not exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees or the men of letters, as opposed to those of the spirit, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven . . . you won’t receive your wages.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 97.

²⁶⁶ Matt. 6:19-21 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 97.

²⁶⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 98.

²⁶⁸ Matt. 6:22-23 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 98.

²⁶⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 98.

²⁷⁰ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 99.

There are two separate characteristics of this logic: Firstly, there is *photology*²⁷¹ where the source of light is the heart: “Ye are the light of the world.”²⁷² If the light were an empirical reality one could hide things from the light, but since the light comes from within, nothing can be hidden, “secrecy is no longer possible.”²⁷³ However, Derrida also plays with the paradox around the French phrase *plus de secret*, which means, if the *s* of *plus* is pronounced, “more secrets/secrecy” and, if the *s* of *plus* is silent, “no more secrets/secrecy.”²⁷⁴ Hence, in French, “no more secrecy [*plus de secret*] means more secrecy [*plus de secret*].”²⁷⁵ This is “a distinction that cannot be made *literally*.”²⁷⁶ Derrida once again recalls the “economy of sacrifice”: “And again, there is an instability in the grammatical play . . . of the *formula* ‘the economy of sacrifice’: one economizes thanks to sacrifice and one economizes sacrifice; it is a sacrifice that economizes or an economy that sacrifices.”²⁷⁷ This is the kind of slippage of meaning that is typical of Derrida, but the point is not trivial. The problem with the internal light, from which nothing is kept secret, is that this “light” is totally within the subjective experience of, let me say, the knight of faith, who then dispenses this light as the light of God. The notion that this light is the light of God *is* a secret that cannot be disclosed to anybody else—at least not in any verifiable way. It really is between the knight of faith and God.

²⁷¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 99.

²⁷² Matt. 5:14 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 99.

²⁷³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 99-100.

²⁷⁴ David Wills in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 100n4.

²⁷⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 100.

²⁷⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 100. This idea brings an insight of note that is relevant to the creation narrative in Genesis 1, which I examine later. God says “Let there be light” on day 1. This is the light of interiority, since the sun (exterior light) is created on day 4. But this means that the light (of day 1) is not tied to literality—of the letter (of the Scribes)—and is instituted at the institution of earth, before there is any literality. It is an invisible light (for if it were visible it would render the creation of the sun redundant), but this very invisibility is tied to justice (via Matthew 5)—and *all of this goes beyond calculation*. But there is a faction in the SDA Church that has converted this text into the very epitome of calculation (God created the world in six consecutive days of twenty-four hours each). What is more, this calculation is the very nature of the Scribe and this is demonstrated by the fact that even though this statement (“6 consecutive days of 24 hours each” or any variation thereof) is not even stated in Genesis 1, there is a desire to inscribe it into belief #6 “Creation”. But beyond this, the inscription could be used to polarise the community and thereby exclude those who “see” things differently.

²⁷⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 100.

Secondly, this “interior” light institutes a new economy: “It breaks with exchange, symmetry, or reciprocity.”²⁷⁸ Derrida notes, that Christ “still talking about the eye, about the right and left, about breaking up a pair or pairing up”²⁷⁹ says, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”²⁸⁰ This statement does not restore the parity of the pair but “interrupts the parity and the symmetry.”²⁸¹ Instead of paying back for the blow on the cheek, one is to “give” the other cheek. This logic “that commands us to suspend the reciprocity of vengeance and not to resist evil is . . . the *logos* itself, which is life and truth, namely Christ, who . . . teaches love for one’s enemies.”²⁸²

Derrida now makes reference to Carl Schmitt who points out that *inimicus* (Latin for “personal enemy”) is not *hostis* (Latin for “an enemy of the state”) and *ekhthros* (Greek for “personal enemy”) is not *polemios* (Greek for “warlike” or “enemy of the state”) and that both the Latin and the Greek use the word for personal enemy in the Sermon on the Mount:²⁸³ “Love your enemies . . . pray for them which . . . persecute you.”²⁸⁴ This indicates that the love for enemies indicated by Christ is that for personal enemies “and does not suppose that love is owed to a public enemy.”²⁸⁵ Hence, “Christ’s teaching would be moral or psychological, even metaphysical, but not political”²⁸⁶ The consequence of this is that any “war waged against Muslims” for example, falls within the sphere of the political and hence is not seen to violate Christ’s command to “love your enemies.”²⁸⁷ Derrida challenges this narrow interpretation and suggests that Leviticus, firstly, does not incorporate “hate thine enemy”—when Christ states, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy

²⁷⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 101.

²⁷⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 101.

²⁸⁰ Matt. 5:38-39 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 102.

²⁸¹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 102.

²⁸² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 102.

²⁸³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 102-3.

²⁸⁴ Matt. 5:44 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 102.

²⁸⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 102.

²⁸⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 102.

²⁸⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 103.

neighbour, and hate thine enemy.”²⁸⁸ Secondly, Leviticus explicitly says: “Thou shalt not avenge . . . but shall love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.”²⁸⁹ On top of this, the Gospel distinguishes between the neighbour (which could possibly be reduced to those in *my* community) and the non-neighbour “not as private enemy but as foreigner, as member of another nation, community, or people.”²⁹⁰

There is an economy that is considered the standard way that people behave, an economy that cannot invoke the reward bestowed by God: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you . . . that ye may be children of your father which is in heaven . . . for if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?”²⁹¹ The symmetry of giving is broken: “If you love only those who love to the extent that they love you, if you hold so strictly to this symmetry, mutuality, and reciprocity, then you give nothing, no love, and the reserve of your wages will be like a tax that is imposed or a debt that is repaid, like the acquittal of a debt.”²⁹² Hence, the “infinite and dissymmetrical economy of sacrifice is opposed both to that of the Scribes and Pharisees, to the old law in general, and to that of heathen ethnic groups or gentiles.”²⁹³ It goes beyond calculation and in the context of the Gospel of Matthew is related to justice, and conforms to “unknowing” and hence the secret. In the sense of giving alms, one’s left hand should not be aware of what one’s right is doing and it is because of this that “thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”²⁹⁴ But this is really an alternative economy, a manipulation that is accomplished via the promise of a greater reward: “God the Father, who sees in secret, will pay back your salary, and on an infinitely greater scale.”²⁹⁵

God therefore has drawn especially close and, in this sense, can scarcely be called transcendent:

I have within me, *thanks to the invisible word as such*, a witness that others cannot see *at the same time other than me and more intimate with me than myself*, as soon as I can have a

²⁸⁸ Matt. 5:43 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 103.

²⁸⁹ Lev. 19:15-18 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 103.

²⁹⁰ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 103-4.

²⁹¹ Matt. 5:44-46 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 105.

²⁹² Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 106.

²⁹³ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 106.

²⁹⁴ Matt. 6:4 (AV), quoted in Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 107.

²⁹⁵ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 107.

secret relationship with myself and not tell everything, as soon as there is secrecy and secret witnessing within me, and for me, then there is what I call God, (there is) what I call God in me . . . I call myself God—a phrase that is difficult to distinguish from “God calls me,” for it is on such condition that I can call myself or be called in secret. God is in me, he is the absolute “me” or “self”²⁹⁶

This “God in me” is made manifest “when there appears the desire and power to render absolutely invisible and to constitute within oneself a witness of that invisibility.”²⁹⁷ Derrida names this “the history of God . . . as the history of secrecy Such a history is also an economy.”²⁹⁸ Derrida hints at what might be termed the metaphysical charade that is Christianity even understood at its best. Once one has identified this interiority of the secret, a secret that God sees in me, it becomes above reproach. If the call of God that resonates within my own soul is that call to which I must be absolutely faithful, and must be absolutely responsible to the negation of all others, then whether I acknowledge it or not, God is located within me. If God is not external to me in this sense (even though I believe that this God is other than me or external to my psyche) then quite evidently I am a God unto myself (though this idea is kept from my own psyche). In any case, it enables one to impose one’s own will as though it is the will of God. Obviously this is not the *intent* of Christianity, but on the other hand, how is anyone to tell the difference and when one looks at the violent history of Christianity, it is difficult not to be cynical.

Derrida, following Baudelaire’s “critique of Christianity, which is at the same time evangelical and heretical,” describes this “young institution” as “that of appearing always as a ‘homicidal and suicidal literature.’ A (hi)story of men and not of women; a story of ‘fellow men’. A history of fraternity and a history of Christianity: ‘Hypocritical reader, my fellow, my brother.’”²⁹⁹ Baudelaire perceives Christian charity to be a charade since it is performed in order to gain an eternal recompense in heaven.

The charade is allowed to stand, however, simply because it is a secret that cannot be unmasked. Since the wholly other is God who encounters the individual *internally*, the sacred other that is identified with this gaze of God (*mysterium tremendum*) is inseparable from the self. The wholly other turns out to not be other at all. *Tout autre est tout autre* stands in sharp objection. The reduction of the wholly other to God (this named entity that is too easily

²⁹⁶ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 108.

²⁹⁷ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 108.

²⁹⁸ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 108.

²⁹⁹ Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 110.

identified with the self) ends up destroying the phrase *tout autre est tout autre*. This means that Derrida's wholly other is *not God*. The wholly other is *any* other. The wholly other, at the very least, is *really, absolutely, totally* and *wholly* other. The reduction of the wholly other to the self is an absolute aberration and denial of the affirmation *tout autre est tout autre*. In every sense, the other is other. The tautology must stand. But also the *heterotautology* must stand, because whatever *tout autre est tout autre* means in its tautological formulation, it is not a repetition of the same. If anything is sacred to Derrida, it is the other, hence *tout autre est tout autre*—no need to grasp French punning to understand this most simple of points.

However, while the self should not give *absolute* precedence or regard to the other (either God or any other other), there must, nevertheless, always remain a regard for the *self* as other. This Derrida explicates with regard to narcissism, something that is generally considered a vice:

Narcissism! There is not narcissism and non-narcissism; there are narcissisms that are more or less comprehensive, generous, open, extended. What is called non-narcissism is in general but the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more open to the experience of the other as other. I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed in advance. The relation to the other—even if it remains asymmetrical, open, without possible reappropriation—must trace a movement of reappropriation in the image of oneself for love to be possible, for example.³⁰⁰

But, this also means that the notion of God, as the one who is infinitely other, to whom I owe absolute allegiance, does not exist in Derrida's thinking—or, at least, not as a uniquely identifiable being. Hence, the monotheistic religions (Abrahamic/Ibrahmic)—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—in any of their orthodox forms (one might say “onto-theological”) are problematic at the outset as, indeed, are their understandings of God.

However, this does not mean that the other has been eclipsed with God, quite the contrary. The wholly other (*tout autre*) is placed in a religious context via the Abraham/Isaac narrative, or one might say in a “sacred space.” Although the God of Abraham does not escape “unscathed” in Derrida's analysis, the *wholly other* (whether one wishes to name “God” or not in this space) is always respected, perhaps, even sacred. If Derrida is to suggest an affirmation of God, it is a God “by other names,” a wholly other God, not a God of the same, and certainly not a God that excludes the other.

³⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, “There is No *One* Narcissism,” in *Jacques Derrida: Points . . . Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 199, quoted in Roffe, 43.

The difficulty for any piece of writing with an interest in theology is that God, or some idea of God, is often placed at the centre or, at least, very close to the centre. Derrida's *tout autre est tout autre* serves to destabilise any construct that is labelled "God." In any case, the idea of the "other" is decentring by its very nature. With this in mind, I will examine in more detail why an inviolable definitive centre is problematic for Derrida via an examination of logocentrism and by placing the idea of the detour at the centre.

1.3. Sacred Centres

One of the accomplices of destabilising and deconstructing a structure is decentring. In terms of any given discourse this decentring can be perceived as particularly problematic. The centre is a focal point around which or upon which understanding is generated. Logic needs a point of reference, and if there is no stable point of reference then our minds will automatically search for one. When preparing a thesis proposal, for example, one of the primary tasks is identifying the research question. What is the point of the thesis? This needs to be summed up in a few words. There needs to be a *logos* at the centre that *precedes* the actual writing (and reading) of the thesis. In contrast to this is the idea of the detour. The detour is a path that is, *according to the preceding logos*, not necessary to follow. It is a diversion that takes longer and follows routes that can be dispensed with. A thesis cannot be a series of disconnected detours with no binding logic. This dissertation is no different. There is a centre, a focal point, and in this subsection of the dissertation, the detour *is* the centre. Its relevance and logic is quite evident since the other is always on a detour. Of course, detours are substitutable. There is always another detour, just like there is another other. It is for this reason that I have taken a further detour through messianism, which is often perceived as "waiting for the other" or, possibly, "watching for the wholly other, God, for example." The point I am trying to emphasise is that although there is a centre, essential for the sake of logic and cohesion, there are detours which help to amplify the meaning that the centre's organising logic provides.

The mistake is to presume that the detours could not be at the centre. But, also, it is a mistake to presume that *anything* can be at the centre and that it makes no difference. All of the ideas that I have placed at the centre have something about them that decentres, that displaces a single, central truth. This is why messianism or logocentrism, for example, should not be at the centre. The centres are substitutable for others, but not *any* others. Messianism waits for a specific, defined other, and everything or everyone who does not conform to this

definition is excluded. In order to clarify a form of the messianic that Derrida can abide, I have taken a detour through hospitality, though it is located under the heading “Messianism.” This enables me to preserve the particular structure of my dissertation while taking a detour through something (hospitality) that possibly should be at the centre. All I am meaning to say by this is that, while the centres as I have selected them *could* be substituted for detours (and hospitality is one of these), it is fair to say that not all detours belong at the centre (and this is true of messianism). To reiterate, the centres are necessary in order to allow understanding, but really, every centre I have chosen is not truly the centre. Their worth is explanatory.

1.3.1. Logocentrism

Like any significant figure who writes, Derrida has certain words, terms or quotable quotes that recur and tend to form our understanding of the “essence” of his thinking. For example, it is hard to imagine an undergraduate excluding the word “deconstruction” when writing a short paragraph about Jacques Derrida. Nevertheless it is a word whose use I have tried to limit in this dissertation, not because it is irrelevant, but because there are substitutions that take place and work just as well, and possibly even better for my purposes.³⁰¹ There are detours. This does not mean that the destination is the point—the idea being that though we take a detour, “getting there in the end” is what counts—as Derrida observes parenthetically with regard to the trace, in the essay “*Différance*”: “and has anyone thought that we have been tracking something down, something other than the tracks themselves to be tracked down?”³⁰²

Still, this detour does lead me to identify a quotable quote from the same essay, one that I have been led to quote myself, and not only here. Anyone who has ever addressed the issue of negative theology and the work of Jacques Derrida probably does so, in some way, via this quotation: “the *detours* [emphasis added], locutions, and syntax in which I will often have to take recourse will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point

³⁰¹ The fact that deconstruction is often considered central to Derrida’s work does not reflect an intent on Derrida’s part: “When I chose this word [deconstruction], or when it imposed itself upon me—I think it was in *Of Grammatology*—I little thought it would be credited with such a central role in the discourse that interested me at the time.” Jacques Derrida, “Letters to a Japanese Friend,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans. Ken Frieden and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2:1-2.

³⁰² Derrida, “*Différance*,” 25.

of being indistinguishable from negative theology.”³⁰³ But what is seldom examined with regard to this quotation is the notion of the detour. I will return to this idea via Derrida’s essay “Des tours de Babel.” Before examining this extremely convoluted essay, it is necessary for me to contrast the idea of the detour with that of logocentrism.

Derrida describes logocentrism in the opening pages of *Of Grammatology* in association with three quotations that I include without addition or deletion:

1. The one who will shine in the science of writing will shine like the sun. A scribe (EP, p. 87)³⁰⁴

O Samas (sun-god), by your light you scan the totality of lands as if they were cuneiform signs (ibid.).

2. These three ways of writing correspond almost exactly to three different stages according to which one can consider men gathered into a nation. The depicting of objects is appropriate to a savage people; signs of words and of propositions, to a barbaric people; and the alphabet to civilized people. J.-J. Rousseau, *Essai sur l’origine des langues*.

3. Alphabetic script is in itself and for itself the most intelligent. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*.³⁰⁵

These quotations appear directly under the heading of the chapter: “Exergue.” This heading is retained from the French in Spivak’s translation of *De La Grammatologie*.³⁰⁶ Its etymology is Greek—*ex* (outside) and *ergon* (work)—carrying the meaning of “outside of the work.” In this sense Derrida’s “Exergue” would not belong to the actual text of *Of Grammatology* (even though it quite clearly does), being “outside of the work.” *Exergue*, in French, can also mean “inscription” and in both English and French has the rather specific meaning: “A little space around or without the figures of a medal, left for the inscription.”³⁰⁷

³⁰³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 6. By way of example, I include an extremely limited list of texts that have referenced this quote: Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 7; Steven Shakespeare, *Derrida and Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2009), 72-73; Harold Coward, “A Hindu Response to Derrida’s View of Negative Theology,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 199; J. Aaron Simmons, *God and the Other: Ethics and Politics after the Theological Turn* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 233.

³⁰⁴ EP is Derrida’s shorthand for the following reference in *De la Grammatologie*: A. Leroi-Gourhan, *L’écriture et la psychologie des peuples* (Actes d’un colloque, 1963). Spivak notes this in her translation, but obviously does not translate the title which can be translated as “The writing and psychology of people.”

³⁰⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 3.

³⁰⁶ Jacques Derrida, *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1997), 11.

³⁰⁷ *Webster’s Online Dictionary*, s.v. “Exergue,” <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/Exergue> (accessed October 7, 2011).

The three quotations (a few lines above) are a “triple exergue” that highlight what Derrida means by logocentrism. This is directly associated with ethnocentrism (which is quite evident in the triple exergue) and is briefly described as “the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example, of the alphabet) which was fundamentally . . . nothing but the original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world . . .” This logocentrism controlled, firstly, “*the concept of writing* where the phoneticization of writing must dissimulate its own history as it is produced.” Speech—“the phoneticization of writing”—is prioritised, and writing is considered to be secondary and for the sake of speech. Secondly, it controlled the history of metaphysics, by which Derrida is referring to Western philosophical discourse—“not only from Plato to Hegel (even including Leibniz) but also beyond these apparent limits, from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger”—which has “always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of the truth, has always been . . . the debasement of writing, and its repression outside of ‘full’ speech.” Thirdly, Derrida includes the “*concept of science* or the scientificity of science—what has always been determined as *logic*,” and logic “has always been a philosophical concept, even if the practice of science has constantly challenged its imperialism of the logos, by invoking for example, from the beginning and ever increasingly, nonphonetic writing.”³⁰⁸

Phonocentrism—“an inflation, not of the graphic, but of the phonic sign, of the rôle of the element of sound in the production of meaning, language as speech”—is “related to logocentrism—the belief that the first and last things are the Logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full selfconsciousness.”³⁰⁹

In every case, the voice is closest to the signified, whether it is determined strictly as sense (thought or lived) or more loosely as thing. All signifiers, and first and foremost the written signifier, are derivative with regard to what would wed the voice indissolubly to the mind or to the thought of the signified sense, indeed to the thing itself . . . The written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive meaning. This derivation is the very origin of the notion of the ‘signifier’. . . . This notion remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 3.

³⁰⁹ Spivak, lxviii-lix.

³¹⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 11-12.

From this Derrida notes that via the voice, the subject hears itself and, thereby, “affects itself and is related to itself in the element of ideality.”³¹¹ Since the voice is perceived as *present* and has been assigned primacy and centrality in gaining meaning—it is logocentric—it thus “supports the determination of the being of the entity as presence.”³¹² Although, Derrida does not, alternatively, wish to prioritise writing over speech, writing, nevertheless, is not similarly plagued by the notion of presence, but by absence—of the reader when it is written and the writer when it is read. Its meaning will always differ and be deferred and not be tied to the present. Derrida’s “Exergue” is an ironic gesture towards writing—a small space left for an inscription in service to the medal (itself, an ironic gesture towards speech). But in truth the medal is only a signifier of a victory of some sort (depending on the particular medal) and fails to signify adequately without the written inscription. The irony is that Derrida’s Exergue in *Of Grammatology* is an inscription inscribed on that small space under the heading of the book itself—*Of Grammatology* (the medal)—which actually turns out to not be speech at all, but writing. This indicates the dependence not merely of the written text on speech, but also of speech on writing.

Caputo precisely outlines logocentrism in a few sentences:

Privileging the philosophy of Plato is what Derrida means by “logocentrism,” making the logic of the argument, the demonstrably true or false claims, the center, while sending everything else off to the periphery as mere rhetoric or ornamentation, letting the logic lead the letter. The result of this logocentric hegemony of the “philosophy,” this concentration of “theses,” is that the text is “neutralized,” “numbed,” “inhibited,” even though these heterogeneous forces continue to stir in their inhibited form. Platonism is not only the first “example” in the West of the construction of such a “philosophy,” but also the paradigm that “commands this *whole* history,” since “philosophy” will always be in one way or another “Platonic.”³¹³

Since the voice, which is directly accessible to the mind (in the sense that one can speak to oneself without actually vocalising), is prioritised over writing, this means that whenever a text is read, there is a thought that is prior which *controls* the manner in which the text is read. “There is a suggestion,” says Spivak, “that this phonocentrism-logocentrism relates to

³¹¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 12.

³¹² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 12.

³¹³ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 83. This insight with regard to the “Platonic” history of philosophy is suggestive of Alfred North Whitehead’s oft-quoted observation: “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 39.

centrism itself—the human desire to posit a ‘central’ presence at beginning and end.”³¹⁴ The problem is that once this centre is identified in the mind, everything that is not understood in direct relation to this centre is considered to be a detour, even extraneous. Caputo, therefore, posits the conclusion: “‘Deconstruction’ will consist in a fine-grained reading of the text, of the literality and textuality of the text, slowly scrupulously, seriously, in releasing the still-stirring forces that ‘philosophy’ and logocentrism strive to contain.”³¹⁵

I would like to circle back to a point I made earlier with regard to quotable quotes. Certain quotations find their way into the public space. They are extracted from the written text and become a sort of generalisation that identifies not merely the essence of the text from which they are sourced, but even the essence of what the given writer generally thinks. This generalization becomes the vocal means by which a philosopher’s thinking (for example) is disseminated, and it precedes any actual reading of the philosopher’s works. This *logocentrism* serves to justify the quotable quote, which produced the particular logocentric view in the first place. It is beyond the bounds of probability that hundreds of independent readers all read Derrida’s “*Différance*” and decided to quote the same passage as the “definitive” one. Secondary sources (and primary sources, for that matter) copy one another and they copy one another’s shortcomings. That is not to say that all secondary sources, for example, are inaccurate or equivalent, but even nuanced understandings can succumb to oversimplifications and imprecise generalizations, by virtue of necessity. One cannot exactly quote every word of an article and so every explication will *condense* what is said and *reduce* arguments to the “essential” components, the *essence*, as it were. By way of example, I quote from an essay by Richard Rorty written in 1991 (before Derrida’s corpus was complete), commenting on Derrida with regard to logocentrism:

“The discourse of philosophy” is to early Derrida as “Being” is to late Heidegger. Both terms refer to something we can never simply walk away from, but instead must constantly struggle with. As Christians think God inescapable and Heidegger thinks Being inescapable, so Derrida thinks “the discourse of philosophy” inescapable. All our attempts to do without it are relations to it. It follows us down the nights and down the days. It waits at the end of every road that seems to lead away from it. Just as Freud thought that we never cease from erotic struggle with images of our parents, no matter how long we live or how little we consciously

³¹⁴ Spivak, lxix.

³¹⁵ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 83.

think about them, so the early Derrida thinks that we cannot escape from logocentric discourse.³¹⁶

This quote serves at least two functions. Firstly, it is a perspective on my own task in this dissertation. Secondly, I wish to extract the term “early Derrida,” which immediately makes one think “late Derrida.” Since Rorty compares *early* Derrida to *late* Heidegger the binary can hardly be in question. No doubt this distinction in Derrida is well-documented, but it is also virtually unverifiable. In order to distinguish early Derrida from late Derrida—categories that one may not even realise should necessarily be distinguished from one another—one would have to read both early Derrida and late Derrida. This would involve reading at least the majority of Derrida’s works. But who is actually going to do that? I ask the question with no facetious intent. To successfully identify categories as early and late Derrida is a mammoth task. And, if some-one did unpack such a huge volume of very difficult text—this is not the time to underestimate how difficult Derrida’s texts can be—would they do so with an eye to verifying Rorty’s point? But more than this, where is the boundary between early and late? Clearly, there is a difference between any separate publications of any author otherwise there would not be two separate publications. The claim pushes one to a logocentric position: If Derrida is read with the prior notion that if he is arguing that the “discourse of philosophy” *cannot* be escaped, it belongs to early Derrida, and if, on the other hand, one of his texts suggest that the “discourse on philosophy” *can* be escaped, then the text must belong to late Derrida. Added to this, since Derrida is so difficult to understand anyway, one often only considers that one has understood the text when one recognises the presence of these logocentric ideas that precede the reading of the text itself.

The detour is something that is other than logocentrism. It is a side-track that could even be viewed as irrelevant. Since I am challenging notions of logocentrism, the detour is given relevance, not because it is an alternative logocentric idea, but because it defies the very idea of being the central word. In a sense, it can never be comfortable at the centre. This is why the detour can be so easily allied with substitution. Whatever one finds on a detour could be the centre and this may allow the detour to remain a detour.

³¹⁶ Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, vol. 2 of *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 107.

1.3.2. Detours

With regard to the aforementioned quotable quote, Caputo notes that even though “the ‘detours, locutions, and syntax’ in which Derrida strives to mark off *différance* will resemble, almost to the point of indistinguishability, *the twists and turns of negative theology* [emphasis added], still deconstruction is no negative theology.”³¹⁷ Although Caputo is not quite precise enough, in that though the quotation is from “*Différance*” and Caputo is no doubt correct when he compares “the twists and turns of negative theology” with the “detours, locution, and syntax” of *différance*, Derrida is more general, stating that “the detours, locutions and syntax *in which I will often have to take recourse* [emphasis added] will resemble those of negative theology.”

Elsewhere, in “*Khôra*,” the notion of the detour is mentioned: “We would never claim to propose the exact word, the *mot juste*, for *khôra*, nor to name it, *itself*, over and above all the turns and *detours* [emphasis added] of rhetoric, nor finally to approach, *itself*, for what it will have been, outside of any point of view, outside of any anachronic perspective.”³¹⁸ This quote comes closer to illustrating why the notion of the detour is instructive in understanding Derrida. In order to explain his meaning, Derrida is bound by the constraints of (usually written) language, so obviously *present* (in the form of a book, for example). But he wishes to upset notions of presence, stable categories and structures, even or especially, within languages. So he searches for other paths, rather than the well-worn ones, detours, if you will. These paths become the “centre” around which the discourse, for the time being, revolves. *Différance* could be at the centre, so could *khôra*, or, even, a detour.

The difficulty with a detour is that it is often interpreted as a lack of focus, a movement into an area that is no longer germane to the perceived point at hand. It is by definition not central. Barbara Mella in “Derrida’s Detour” notes the paradox of writing on the notion of “detour” while writing specifically on this word with an unequivocal focus:

I must draw margins around what I write, to differentiate between what is relevant and what is not so relevant. Between the inside and the outside. I must confine my writing to the inside, enclose it within a perimeter, which forms a circular line, an orbit around the text. I am not allowed to go outside, ex-orbit unless through footnotes or parenthesis (discrete strategies to overrun or spill over the circumference, taking the text somewhere other, on a detour, but always only to come back to the inside of the main topic). But what is the main topic of this

³¹⁷ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 7.

³¹⁸ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 93.

text? You must excuse me if I was already digressing, already blurring the borders. So end of note: I will get back on track.³¹⁹

Mella refers to “two similar withholdings: Derrida’s and Spivak’s.” In the first place, Mella notes that Spivak quotes a passage from “*Différance*” in the “Translator’s Preface” to *Of Grammatology*, and in commenting on this passage states: “It emphasises the presence of Freud in the articulation of what comes close to becoming Derrida’s master-concept—‘différance’ spelled with an ‘a.’ Let us fasten on three moments in the quotation—‘differing,’ ‘deferring,’ and ‘detour.’”³²⁰ Having then claimed to “fasten on these three moments,” Spivak “returns to *differing* and *deferring* as anticipated, but she never returns to detour.”³²¹ Similarly, “Derrida, only mentions Freud (a Freudian non-slip) in relation to the origin of this idea of detour, but no one else.”³²² Mella then goes on to study the etymology of the word, which is interesting in and of itself, resulting in such meanings as “exorbitant,” “ellipsis,” and “circle.”³²³ I would like to move in a different direction.

I am not convinced that Derrida has not written explicitly on the notion of detour. I am referring here to his essay “Des tours de Babel.”³²⁴ The title itself is a play on words. “*Des* means ‘some’; but it also means ‘of the,’ ‘from the,’ or ‘about the.’ *Tours* could be towers, twists, tricks, turns, or tropes, as in ‘turn’ of phrase. Taken together, *des* and *tours* have the same sound as *detour*, the word for detour.”³²⁵ There are numerous possible English translations: “Detours of Babel;” “Around the Towers of Babel;” “About the Turns of Phrase of Babel” or, even, “Detours of Confusion.” One can understand why Joseph Graham did not translate the title; *Des tours* defies a single translation and *Babel* is a proper noun (though often perceived as a common noun: “confusion”) and, hence, does not submit to translation.

My reason, in the first place, for selecting this essay as significant (though surely it could have been substituted for another), is that it has Derrida examining a portion of the Old Testament (“sacred text”) from the same Scripture that forms my particular case for

³¹⁹ Barbara Mella, “Derrida’s Detour,” *Reconstruction* 2, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 5, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/024/mella.htm> (accessed October 2, 2011).

³²⁰ Spivak, xliii in Mella, 7.

³²¹ Mella, 7.

³²² Mella, 7.

³²³ Mella, 7.

³²⁴ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 191-225.

³²⁵ Joseph F. Graham, *Difference in Translation*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 206.

examination (Genesis 1).³²⁶ Second, the tower of Babel narrative has particular significance for the multiplicity of languages in the context of a sacred text—and Derrida makes several references to the notion of sacred text in the essay. Third, Derrida, actually points to something and names it sacred, not in the sense of some (other) religion, or in the sense of the text in Genesis 11, but in relation to his own argument. I will, therefore, treat this text—a translated text on translation examining a translated text—as sacred, and follow it as closely as I dare, for the sake of, rather than in spite of, any detours. This, I believe, takes us a step closer to what may be sacred for Jacques Derrida; yet, because it is a detour, this is only accomplished by stepping away.

The narrative of the tower of Babel speaks of the relation of language to itself, of one language to another, of the need for and the impossibility of translation. This relation to language (the origin of the “irreducible multiplicity of tongues”) is juxtaposed with an architectural construction, that is incomplete, unfinished. There is, Derrida suggests, “the translation of a system in deconstruction.”³²⁷

With reference to Voltaire, Derrida points out that etymologically Babel means Father (*Ba*) God (*Bel*).³²⁸ The point is that Babel is both a proper noun (and, hence, untranslatable) and a common noun (“confusion”). Confusion, here, has a double meaning: the confusion of tongues and the state of confusion of the architects whose construction is interrupted. The meaning of “confusion” is confused. But more than this, the name Babel (Father God) refers to a city that is called confusion: “God, the God, would have marked with his patronym a community space, that city where people no longer understand one another.”³²⁹ God is not only father, he is the father of language, but this gift of language is poisoned (*Gift-gift*—“Poison present”)³³⁰ via “the multiplicity of idioms, of what in other words are usually called

³²⁶ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* brackets Genesis 1:1-11:26 under the title “From the Creation of the World to Abraham,” incorporating the Creation Narrative and the Tower of Babel story. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 1:205.

³²⁷ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 192.

³²⁸ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 192.

³²⁹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 192-93.

³³⁰ This is possibly a reference to the *pharmakon* that is both remedy and poison. See Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 67-186.

mother tongues.”³³¹ The striving of this “great Semitic family”³³² to impose and universalise their tongue is confounded.

Derrida has recourse to two French translations of the narrative (Louis Segond’s and André Chouraqui’s). Segond strays from the “literality” of the Hebrew where a more exact translation would render “lip” (Chouraqui) rather than “tongue” (Segond), by which is meant “language.”³³³ I am somewhat startled by what appears to be carelessness on the part of Derrida in this section. Firstly, he makes use of two French translations with an oblique reference to the Hebrew text. The word he is concerned to translate is *sapâ* and can rightly be translated “lip” or “language,” but given Derrida’s preoccupation with etymology and the origin of words, one would have thought that he would have noted its related and provocative meaning: “As the lips were seen to be the outer edge of the mouth, the word *sapâ* was also used in various contexts to represent types of edges and borders.”³³⁴ The “lip” therefore signifies “language” which itself signifies the point that separates one from another, the boundary that divides. This is all contained in the Hebrew word itself. This is illustrative of what Derrida is outlining with regard to the impossibility of ideal translation. Derrida is dealing to a large degree with French translations of the Bible (Segond’s and Chouraqui’s), and although meaning is *gained* in translation, meaning is also *lost*.

At this point, Derrida notes the resemblance to translation in the phrase: “And brick served them as stone, and tar served as cement.”³³⁵ He poses the question: “I do not know how to interpret this allusion to substitution or the transmutation of materials” and then sidesteps the detour in a humorous feint: “But let us leave it and substitute a second translation for the first” (by which he means he is shifting to Chouraqui’s translation from Segond’s).³³⁶ Derrida suggests a detour, but then doesn’t follow it. Derrida plays with different possible translations and substitutions, and this may be the second allusion (the first

³³¹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 193.

³³² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 193.

³³³ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 193-94.

³³⁴ *Theological Wordbook*, s.v. “2278.”

³³⁵ Gen. 11:3, quoted in Derrida “Des tours de Babel,” 194. This Bible verse does not precisely match any obvious English translation and is that given in Derrida’s text via translator Joseph E. Graham, although its meaning does not diverge particularly from most English translations. For example, the Authorised Version gives the following: “And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.”

³³⁶ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 194.

allusion being the tower as architecture and the tower as language) to the plural in his title: “Des tours de Babel.” Why *towers*—plural? The Genesis narrative mentions only *one* tower of Babel. Although Derrida doesn’t directly address this apparent anomaly, it seems to me that the very notion of translation requires the plural. It is a reference to the multiplicity of tongues (obviously), but also to the fact that every translation is also an interpretation. There is no one-to-one correspondence between languages. Hence Segond (the first translation) translates *sapâ* as “tongue,” and Chouraqui (the second translation—rendering the towers plural) translates it “lip”. Yet, and this points to what I think Derrida is doing, Segond and Chouraqui do not actually translate *sapâ* into “tongue” and “lip” at all, but rather “*langue*” and “*lèvre*.” I am dealing in translation (English not French) as is Derrida (French not Hebrew), since by what irony should he not, where translation is the whole point. But notice that a single Hebrew word (*sapâ*) has now been substituted by four separate words (two in French and two in English). These are the *towers* of Babel and they are not synonymous. But on the other hand, they are not unrelated; confused maybe, but not unrelated. To rephrase this in terms of the detour: If I read the tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11 in a single *English* translation, this is one “of the towers” (*des tours*) of Babel. But this is a detour from the Hebrew text, the most originary version available. But Hebrew itself is not the original unconfused pre-Babel language. It too is one of the towers, a detour. The only languages available are detours.

God punishes the builders for wanting to ascend to the Most High, but more importantly in wanting to thereby “*make a name for themselves* [an idiom that signifies all they are trying to accomplish]” and construct for themselves “a unique and universal genealogy.”³³⁷ God then (jealously) confounds these ambitions, deconstructing the tower, confusing the universal language and scattering the genealogical filiations. This God does by the imposition of his own name, YHWH (an unpronounceable name, which occurs in conjunction with the name “Babel”). This name of God, this idiom triumphs:

Translation then becomes necessary and impossible, like the effect of a struggle of the appropriation of the name, necessary and forbidden in the interval between two absolutely proper names. And the proper name of God is divided enough in the tongue, already, to signify also, confusedly, ‘confusion’.³³⁸

³³⁷ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 195.

³³⁸ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 196.

Derrida now makes reference to James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, a notoriously difficult work of convoluted metaphors and portmanteau words, which he unsurprisingly names "a Babelian book."³³⁹ In this regard, Derrida invokes the enigmatic phrase "and he war."³⁴⁰ The meaning is not obvious, but I think can be understood if one realises that God confuses the languages, "and he [God]" in this movement goes to "war." It is the war that God declares (institutes) by generating multiple languages. But the war itself cannot be won because to "win" would mean a return to the single universal language before God's imposition of confusion. The only way to return to a kind of "pre-Babelian" world is for a particular language to eradicate all others, hence the polemic. This polemic is at work in the very task of translation. It is a work of exclusion. For example, it is one thing to translate one language into another, but what is one to do if there are multiple languages (recalling that multiple languages is the post-Babelian condition) in a single text that one wishes to translate? "How is the effect of plurality to be 'rendered'?"³⁴¹ Translation into a particular language presumes that one is translating for an audience that is restricted to the translated language. So if a text has portions written in, say, French and German, a one-to-one translation would just translate each word (whether French or German) into English (assuming English is the language of translation), but would be unable to demonstrate that the original text had two different languages. Hence, the translation has excluded an "other" (German or French). This could be acknowledged in some sort of parenthetical supplement, a footnote, for instance, but the translation itself would have to declare war on one or other or both of the languages, because of its own singularity. Translation in this sense is a movement of exclusion. If everything that is ever said or written could just be translated adequately into English (*my* language) then I would have no need for any *other* (language). This sort of imperialism hints at the nature of the war that is instituted with the multiple languages. There is no return to a universal language that is not the most offensive polemic against all other languages.

Babel is both a proper noun and a common noun. As a proper noun it is untranslatable, but it also means "confusion," a meaning that can be translated (a common noun). The moment one translates a proper noun, it can no longer be a proper noun. Two points are made with regard to "Babel" and its translation: 1) "A proper name, in the proper

³³⁹ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 196.

³⁴⁰ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 196.

³⁴¹ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 196.

sense, does not properly belong to language;” and 2) “Anyone whose so-called mother tongue was the tongue of Genesis could indeed understand Babel as ‘confusion’; that person then effects a *confused* translation of the proper name by its common equivalent without having need for another word.”³⁴² Derrida is quite careful here in that he refers to the “so-called mother tongue” that is not the original “father tongue” of the narrative, nor, necessarily Hebrew (the language of the author as it is relayed to us). Rather, this is a mother tongue, that is, one of the confused languages that now is faced with translating the pre-Babelian language (“father tongue”) into one of the confused languages, that is, “Babel” into “Babel.” But the translation “Babel” (a mother tongue) is confused because it no longer precisely identifies Father (*Ba*) God (*Bel*)—a pure language where the signified and signifier neatly align—but also denotes confusion.

Derrida now distinguishes three forms of translation derived from Roman Jakobson’s “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation.”³⁴³ 1) Intralingual (interprets linguistic signs with signs within the same language); 2) Interlingual (interprets linguistic signs by means of some other language); and 3) Transmutation (interprets linguistic signs by means of systems of non-linguistic signs).³⁴⁴ Intralingual and transmutation require explanation and definition to be understood, whereas interlingual translation is “translation proper.”³⁴⁵ The term is, itself, an “intralingual translation,” nevertheless this “proper” translation is the translation that is required post-Babel owing to the multiplicity of tongues. This is proper translation and “the other translations would be in a position of intralingual and inadequate translation . . .”³⁴⁶ Hence, this narrative of Babel, “at once archetypical and allegorical, could serve as an introduction to all the so-called theoretical problems of translation.”³⁴⁷

³⁴² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 198.

³⁴³ Roman Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” (1959), quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 198.

³⁴⁴ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 198.

³⁴⁵ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 199.

³⁴⁶ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 199.

³⁴⁷ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 199-200.

An article by Walter Benjamin, translated by Maurice de Gandillac, entitled “The Task of the Translator”³⁴⁸ is now examined. Derrida, not without a sense of irony, acknowledges that a reading of this should have led to a reading of “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man” also by Benjamin. It is found in the same volume translated by de Gandillac, and features explicit reference to Babel, but Derrida avoided the article because he found it “overly enigmatic in character.”³⁴⁹ In any event, this means that Derrida is dealing with a French translation (de Gandillac) of a German text (Benjamin) that deals with translation. In my case, then, I am dealing with an English translation of a French text that deals with a French translation of a German text. This is to be further exacerbated by the fact that Benjamin himself quotes Mallarmé in French!

Benjamin describes the task of translation as a “debt to render”³⁵⁰ and Derrida acknowledges this language of “gift and debt.”³⁵¹ The task of the translator is a “restitution of meaning” amidst the metaphor of “the transmission of a family seed.”³⁵² Hence, a key theme of Benjamin’s text is “the ‘kinship’ of languages”—suggesting “the very possibility of historical linguistics.”³⁵³ Benjamin, writing in German, at one point includes two additional languages: Latin (which he footnotes as such), and a quote from Mallarmé, which he leaves untranslated in French, “left shining in his text like the medallion of a proper name.”³⁵⁴ How is de Gandillac to translate French amidst German into French amidst French, without losing the tenor of the original? The point is that we assume that the translator is given the meaning by the original text (gift),³⁵⁵ which s/he now renders (the debt to give back) in the translated language, and thus, there is restitution (the meaning of the original is rendered). This

³⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *1913-1926*, trans. Harry Zohn, vol. 1 of *Selected Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 253-63, quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 200ff.

³⁴⁹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 200.

³⁵⁰ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 200.

³⁵¹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 201.

³⁵² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 200.

³⁵³ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 201.

³⁵⁴ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 201.

³⁵⁵ I reiterate that “gift” in German (which is the language of Benjamin’s text) means “poison,” hence the *pharmakon* (remedy and poison).

restitution in the new translated language is the “maturation of the seed.”³⁵⁶ This means that the “ground” of translation is that everything in the original text can, in fact, find expression in the translated text without a loss of meaning. But this is not the case, and the ground of translation recedes “as soon as the restitution of meaning (*Wiedergrabe des Sinnes*) ceases to provide the measure.”³⁵⁷

This point needs to be emphasised. Since there is a loss of meaning in translation, there is something in the original that is lost, though *not* without a trace. This idea is part of the value of the detour. The detour uncovers these traces. This is because the trace is not the evident well-travelled path. It is concealed and hidden, but not gone. It can be found.

Benjamin uses metaphors of “life” and “family” in relation to language and translation.³⁵⁸ His preface “circulates without ceasing among the values of seed, life and, especially, ‘survival’.”³⁵⁹ Three words are related to one another with reference to the task of the translator: *Übersetzen*; *Übertragen* and *Überleben* (translating, transferring and survival).³⁶⁰ The translator (Joseph F. Graham) of “Des tours de Babel” renders the German *überleben* or the French *survie* as “sur-vival” (the inverted commas are in the text) in order to invoke the etymology that is not as evident in the English as it is in both the German and the French (“above-life” or “over-life”).³⁶¹ This “sur-vival” of the text “exceeds biological life and death”—it is not the survival of the author or the translator (“survival of works not authors”): “The work does not simply live longer, it lives *more and better*, beyond its author’s means.”³⁶²

The relation is between two texts (not donor and donee in the sense of the author of the original and the translator). In this regard, Benjamin makes four points. First, the task of the translator does not follow from reception. The debt to translate is presented by the

³⁵⁶ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 202.

³⁵⁷ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 202.

³⁵⁸ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 202.

³⁵⁹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 202.

³⁶⁰ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 254, quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 202-3.

³⁶¹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 203.

³⁶² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 203.

original text and since the relation is between original and translation, it is not the translator who is the “indebted receiver.”³⁶³

Second, the essential goal of translation “is not *to communicate*.” And Derrida adds, “No more is the goal of the original [to communicate].” Following Benjamin, Derrida states that “for a poetic or a sacred text, communication is not the essential” after having already pointed out that “the intralinear version [a translation in the same language] of the sacred text would be the model or ideal of any possible translation in general.” What I think is meant here is that in order to translate into a different language, the translator would ask what the original communicates (in other words) before considering how to phrase this in the language of translation, which actually distances the translation from the original (since the translation is considered “in other words”). This is clearly problematic, since one is concerned with translating the original “as the signature of a kind of proper name destined to ensure its survival as a work.”³⁶⁴

Third, “[i]f between the translated text and the translating text . . . there is indeed a relation of ‘original’ to version, it could not be *representative* or *reproductive*. Translation is neither image nor copy.”³⁶⁵ The task of the translator is described as a “law” or “demand” which is grounded in the “authority of the original” and refers to “translation as form.”³⁶⁶ This form is prescribed by the original. Two questions are asked: 1) Is there a “capable” translator? 2) Does the work “require translation?”³⁶⁷ Whether there is a capable translator or not does not change “the demand or in the structure of the injunction that comes from the work.”³⁶⁸ The *surviving* dimension of the work is an *a priori* and hence the work is called “unforgettable” (whether it is remembered or not), and demands translation (whether it is translated or not).³⁶⁹ In addition, the correspondence between languages that makes

³⁶³ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 203.

³⁶⁴ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 204.

³⁶⁵ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 204.

³⁶⁶ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 205.

³⁶⁷ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 205.

³⁶⁸ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 205.

³⁶⁹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 205.

translation possible is assured by “a thought of God.”³⁷⁰ This curious affirmation by Benjamin is quite Babelian. The translation which comes about via the idea of survival is not a “faithful representation of the original” it “is itself in the process of transformation.”³⁷¹ It is a mutation of the original, a “postmaturation . . . of a seed.”³⁷² This is not merely a metaphor but, “in its very essence, the history of languages is determined as ‘growth’, ‘holy growth of languages’.”³⁷³

Fourth (following the three negations of reception, communication and representation), Benjamin addresses the question as to “who is committed to translate and from where the commitment is derived?”³⁷⁴ In response, Derrida suggests, with particular attention to the Babel narrative, that “the first debtor is the original.”³⁷⁵ On the one hand, there are the constructors of the tower who wish to make a name for themselves and “found a universal tongue that translates itself by itself.”³⁷⁶ On the other, there is also God, who likewise appeals to translation, not only because of the confused languages, but also because *God’s name* “should be translated as confusion to be understood”³⁷⁷ So, as a petitioner for translation, God is indebted: “[God] has not finished pleading for the translation of his [sic] name even as he [sic] forbids it. For Babel is untranslatable.”³⁷⁸

There is a contract that is inherent in the demand to translate: “The signature of this singular contract need not be documented or archived writing: it nevertheless takes place as trace or trait, and this place takes place even if no empirical or mathematical objectivity

³⁷⁰ Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” in *1913-1926*, trans. Harry Zohn, vol. 1 of *Selected Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 70, quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 206.

³⁷¹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 206.

³⁷² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 206.

³⁷³ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 206.

³⁷⁴ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 206-7.

³⁷⁵ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 207.

³⁷⁶ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 207.

³⁷⁷ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 207.

³⁷⁸ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 207-8.

pertain to its space.”³⁷⁹ The problem of this translation contract is that it must express itself absolutely and completely in multiple languages without any variation of meaning. The language contract must operate “within a single idiom. Another name, perhaps, for the origin of tongues. Not the origin of language but of languages—before language, languages plural.”³⁸⁰ This then leads one back to the “kinship of languages.” Benjamin notes: “Thus translation has ultimately as goal to express the most intimate relation among languages.”³⁸¹

The metaphor of life or survival (“sur-vival”) is expanded further although Derrida prefers “ammetaphora.”³⁸² This is a reference to the metaphor of kinship or “love”—“am” being a prefix meaning “love” or “like” but is also directly related to the metaphor of a broken amphora. The translation does not copy the original but is a “moment in the growth of the original.”³⁸³ This means that the original at its very origin “was not there without fail, full, complete, total, identical to itself.”³⁸⁴ Although Derrida does not speak of *différance* at this point of the discussion, one can immediately perceive how *différance* complicates the task of translation. The original is written in “a foreign tongue” (in relation to the translated language), but this original (foreign) language is not an *ideal* language that perfectly presents “essence” in all its purity. It is, itself, subject to interpretation and *différance*. How is one to translate the *différance* at play in a language and find the pure truth of the text? Derrida follows Benjamin: “To redeem in his own tongue that pure language exiled in the foreign tongue, to liberate by transposing this pure language captive in the work, such is the task of the translator.”³⁸⁵ Another metaphor is now added, that of a tangent touching a circle, so the

³⁷⁹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 208. Derrida refers to the “place” of this contract as *topos* (Greek for place, location etc.) and *not khôra* (also Greek for, possibly, place, location etc.). Possibly the reason for this is that although the contract is not empirically observable in the text, it remains an “unwritten” contract that is nevertheless understood intelligibly. A text in a particular language always presents itself to another language as requiring translation. This is easily understood as a movement between the sensible and the intelligible not necessarily requiring recourse to a *triton genos* (such as *khôra*). I will examine *khôra* in detail later.

³⁸⁰ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 209.

³⁸¹ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 255, quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 209.

³⁸² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 211.

³⁸³ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 211.

³⁸⁴ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 211.

³⁸⁵ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 261, quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 211.

translation touches the original providing “an infinitely small point of meaning.”³⁸⁶ This is coupled with the fragment of the amphora: “just as the debris becomes recognizable as fragments of the same amphora, original and translations become recognizable as fragments of a larger language.”³⁸⁷

With regard to the idea of the “ammetaphora,” it can be further said that “a translation weds the original when the two adjoined fragments, as different as they can be, complete each other so as to form a larger tongue in the course of sur-vival that changes them both.” Derrida names this idea “the translation contract” and likens it to a “hymen or marriage contract with the promise to produce a child whose seed will give rise to history and growth.” Furthermore, the “promise points towards a kingdom that is at once ‘promised and forbidden, where the languages will be reconciled and fulfilled’.” This, says Derrida, is “the most Babelian note in an analysis of sacred writing as the model and the limit of all writing The sacred and the being-to-be-translated do not let themselves be thought one without the other: They produce each other at the edge of the same limit.” But the “kingdom is never reached There is something untouchable, and in this sense the reconciliation is only promised.” The amphora in its completed state represents the pre-Babelian (perfect and ideal) language. But the amphora has been broken and each fragment represents one of the confused post-Babelian tongues. Thus when two fragments are “wedded together” they move towards that undivided kingdom of the ideal tongue. This ideal language is the limit, the ultimate goal *or* source of all translation. It is the very notion of sacred writing, *but* it cannot be reached: “The kingdom is never reached, touched, trodden by the translation.”³⁸⁸

“Of what does the untouchable consist, if there is such a thing?”³⁸⁹ Derrida addresses this question with regard to Benjamin’s metaphors (ammetaphora): First, in terms of the hymen of a virgin, which is “an untouchable remnant” that will “remain intact at the end of the operation;”³⁹⁰ second, via a metaphor of fruit and skin, the core and the shell, where the core is untouchable and beyond reach (without *breaking* the skin or the shell);³⁹¹ third, there

³⁸⁶ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 261, quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 211.

³⁸⁷ Benjamin, “Task of the Translator,” 260, quoted in Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 212.

³⁸⁸ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 213.

³⁸⁹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 213.

³⁹⁰ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 214.

³⁹¹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 214-15.

is a cloak that covers the body of the king, where the king's body is the "tenor" of the original language and the cloak is the translation that can never quite match the tenor.³⁹² "This body is only promised, announced, and dissimulated by translation. The clothes fit but do not cling strictly enough to the royal person."³⁹³

Derrida is addressing the question of truth. Truth is not the idea of an accurate translation, it is beyond any "*Übertragung*" and "*Übersetzung*"³⁹⁴ and is rather "the *pure language* in which the meaning and the letter are no longer dissociated."³⁹⁵ The distinction between the translation and original is now expressed as it is in legal treatises concerning the positive law of translations (which ensure copyright for works and authors). These laws apply to translations of the original but also translations of translations which are nevertheless said to be "derived" from the original. The translation is distinct from the original only in *expression* since the translator is "not supposed to touch the content" (clearly).³⁹⁶ Derrida quotes Claude Colombet and Henri Desbois to make the same point: translators make choices between different words and expressions and are in this sense creative, but they can "never modify the composition [by which is meant content and possibly anything in the form of the original that is not 'to do with the form of linguistic expression, the choice of words in the language, and so forth'³⁹⁷] of the work translated, for [s/he] is bound to respect that work."³⁹⁸ The promise of translation is the "reconciliation of languages" that marries "two languages like two parts of a greater whole" appealing to "a language of truth." This language of truth is "a language whose truth would be referred only to itself."³⁹⁹

The "intention" of translation is related to the kinship of languages: "Through each language something is intended that is the same and yet that none of the languages can attain

³⁹² Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 215-16.

³⁹³ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 215.

³⁹⁴ That is not transmission, transference or translation.

³⁹⁵ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 217.

³⁹⁶ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 217-18.

³⁹⁷ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 218.

³⁹⁸ Claude Colombet, *Propriété littéraire et artistique* (Paris: Dalloz, 1976), quoted in Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 219.

³⁹⁹ Derrida, "Des tours de Babel," 220-21.

separately.”⁴⁰⁰ There is a “co-deployment” of “their intentional modes” that aims to attain “the pure language.”⁴⁰¹

What [this cooperation of languages is] aiming at intentionally, individually and together, in translation is the language itself as Babelian event . . . it is the being-language of the language, tongue or language *as such*, that unity without any self-identity that makes for that there are plural *languages* and that they are *languages*.⁴⁰²

According to Derrida’s reading of Benjamin, these languages actually add to one another:

“Owing to translation, in other words, to this linguistic supplementarity by which one language gives to another what it lacks, and gives it harmoniously, this crossing of languages assures the growth of languages, even that ‘holy growth of languages’ ‘unto the messianic end of history’.”⁴⁰³ The notion of the messianic end related to “the holy growth of languages” is “present” in the “experience of translation” that brings us into relation with this “language of truth” in the sense of its “remoteness.”⁴⁰⁴ “[T]he sacred text” presents itself as “pure translatability” where “meaning and literality are no longer discernable as they form the body of a unique, irreplaceable, and untransferable event, ‘materially the truth’.”⁴⁰⁵ It is because of the “indistinction of meaning and literality (*Wortlichkeit*)” that “the purely translatable can announce itself, give itself, present itself, let itself be translated *as untranslatable*.”⁴⁰⁶

Babel then demonstrates “the law imposed by the name of God who in one stroke commands and forbids you to translate by showing *and* hiding from you the limit.” Not only this, the narrative itself is “the status and the event of the Babelian text It comes under the law that it recounts and translates in an exemplary way. It lays down the law it speaks about, and from abyss to abyss it deconstructs the tower, and every turn, twists and turns of every sort,”⁴⁰⁷ in a rhythm.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁰ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 221.

⁴⁰¹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 221.

⁴⁰² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 221-22.

⁴⁰³ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 222.

⁴⁰⁴ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 223.

⁴⁰⁵ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 223.

⁴⁰⁶ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 223.

⁴⁰⁷ A reference to the pun in the title—*tours* (twists and turns of phrase).

⁴⁰⁸ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 224.

Derrida describes what occurs in the sacred text as “the event of a *pas de sens*.” *Pas de sens* presents a pun of sorts revolving around the word *pas*—meaning “not” or “step”—hence “step (*pas*) of (*de*) meaning (*sens*)” or “of (*de*) no (*pas*) meaning (*sens*).” This “no meaning” “does not signify poverty of meaning but no meaning that would be itself beyond literality.”⁴⁰⁹

What I think Derrida is driving at is that there is an event (in this case the construction and deconstruction of Babel). This event is literality and a translation should not transfer any meaning beyond this, because this is the sacred (truth). “The sacred surrenders itself to translation [enforced by the multiplicity of tongues in the confusion of languages], which devotes itself to the sacred.”⁴¹⁰ “The truth of pure language,”⁴¹¹ then, is aligned with the sacred and is not limited by the exterior signs of language (words, letters, syntax etc.) as we perceive “mother tongues” to operate. Rather this pure language melds with the event perfectly and is not distanced from the event (made remote) by the confused post-Babelian tongues. We may alternatively call it the “father tongue” or “the sacred text.” It seems to be a type of idealism towards which the multiplicity of tongues strive in translation—each translation providing a *pas de sens*. Despite this origin, it is impossible to reach back and take hold of the pure language in any absolute way. What is more, to try and impose a so-called universal language (such as that of the constructors of the tower of Babel) does not assist in understanding but results in more confusion. The necessity to translate is compounded and multiplied. Derrida’s closing remarks with regard to the translating of the signature as located “between the lines”⁴¹² is pointing towards the limitation of the actual construct of language, again, that the words and forms of a language cannot reach: “For to some degree, all the great writings, but to the highest point holy Scripture, contain between the lines their virtual translation. The interlinear version of the sacred text is the model or ideal of all translation.”⁴¹³ Hence, “interlinear” is not only reading between the lines, but the translation which exhibits more than one language, that is a multiplicity of tongues. The messianic end

⁴⁰⁹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 224.

⁴¹⁰ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 224.

⁴¹¹ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 224.

⁴¹² Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 225.

⁴¹³ Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” 225.

(which can never be reached) demands that we embrace a multiplying of languages and not a reduction.⁴¹⁴

Since the sacred (and/or the sacred text) is beyond the reach of language, every detour, every tower, every language, every other must be acknowledged as a *pas de sens*. As I indicated a few pages ago, this is not unlike taking a step closer by stepping away: following the detour. The sacred is present in the translated text, but only as a trace. In this idea of the sacred text, then, the sacred text does not exist as presence and nor does the sacred.

This can be more clearly understood if one refers to specific events, literal occurrences, actual happenings that become the target for thoughts of the sacred—one might say the truth. With regard to this dissertation I am examining the creation narrative in Genesis 1 in relation to certain SDA interpretations. The primary interpretation claims that Genesis 1 describes what *really* happened. The sacred is the act of creation, the truth of the event. But the event itself does not exist as presence, rather it is signified by a relatively short description in Genesis 1. This description is quite removed from the event itself. Even if one had the autograph/s of the book of Genesis, it would not be written in the actual sacred text (pre-Babelian language) that melds perfectly with the event. The sacred is always several steps away, out of reach, untouchable—not because it *shouldn't* be touched, but because it can't be touched. Post-Babelian languages remain and while they may appear to provide unnecessary detours, they do at least provide a *pas de sens*. The more that languages are multiplied and the more they meet in translation, the closer one draws to the ideal single universal language that is united with the event, that is, the sacred. To move towards the sacred, one has to step away from the same (my language) towards the other (foreign language).

But there are also “others” of the same language, i.e. intralingual translations. Substitution is not merely a movement from one language into another, a French word into an English word, for example. Confusion is not merely something that occurs because there are different languages, confusion occurs within a single language. Perhaps Derrida would not object if this word confusion were substituted for another: *différance*. *Différance* is the play within language that occurs because there is a trace that resists a single ideal meaning. The

⁴¹⁴ This is even more valid for a reading of Genesis 1 (the text that I am particularly concerned to examine), since Genesis 1 is a (creation) narrative that is prior to the Babel narrative and is even more remote. To reach the absolute truth of the matter is not possible, but a multiplying of translations (interpretations) is required to more closely approximate the event of creation itself (in language) as it is outlined in Genesis 1 (which is written in a language—Hebrew—that is already remote).

idea of confusion, however, is problematic because it seems to suggest that if we could just disentangle things sufficiently it would be possible to properly understand, i.e. discover the one truth. But there is no single truth, not anymore. There is no pre-Babelian reality available, no such determined presence. There is plurality and multiplicity. The *truth* is that there are others, many others.

I will now examine the notion of deferral in the concept of the messiah and the coming of the other. The religious connotations of the messiah suggest a religious connection and, perhaps, even a *sacred* other, which makes it a detour worth following.

1.3.3. Messianism

The idea of the messiah proliferates not only in major religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—but also, as Derrida notes, in “‘philosophical messianisms,’ the teleologies and eschatologies of Hegel, Marx, Heidegger”⁴¹⁵ and more—one need not stop there. The idea of the messiah, this other who is to come who will solve all problems with power and justice, has proved a compelling one. Its association with the coming of justice in the figure of the other is, perhaps, the primary attraction for Derrida, though Derrida is concerned to distinguish the messianic from messianism.

In the context of “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” Derrida immediately identifies the messianic as “messianicity without messianism.” This is defined as “the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration.” The messianic is further described in opposition to messianism: “This messianic dimension does not depend upon any messianism, it follows no determinate revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion”⁴¹⁶

Messianism is, therefore, associated with a *determined* expectation. The moment that one can identify what is to come, who is to come, when they are to come, or how they are to come, one is engaging in messianism. In this sense, Derrida dismisses notions of the *identified* messiah in Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam, along with all their derivatives. The element of determination, an ontotheology, or a logocentrism that precedes the coming of the other negates the very concept of alterity that the essence of the

⁴¹⁵ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 160.

⁴¹⁶ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 56.

messiah represents. Since Derrida has located the trace of the messianic in the “desert in the desert”⁴¹⁷ before “the link between men [*sic*] as such or between men [*sic*] and the divinity of the god . . .”⁴¹⁸ it *must* precede all religions, because in this desert there is no foothold to provide any religious dogma.

The messianic is tied to an “expectation” which has no definitive content: “By definition [it] is not and ought not to be certain of anything, either through knowledge, consciousness, conscience, foreseeability or any kind of programme as such.” However, Derrida ties this messianic expectation to numerous concepts which cast light—albeit “nocturnal light”—on exactly how Derrida’s messianic is distinguished from messianism. These include notions such as the promise, justice, faith, the other and hope. “An invincible desire for justice is linked to this expectation.” The faith spoken of here should be understood as “trust” in “relation to the other” and not in the sense of a religion—as one speaks colloquially of “the faiths of the world,” for example. “This justice . . . alone allows the hope, beyond all ‘messianisms’” and “inscribes itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other.” For Derrida, messianicity as a “faith without dogma, which makes its way through the risks of absolute night, cannot be contained in any traditional opposition, for example that between reason and mysticism.”⁴¹⁹

Derrida further refers to the “universalizable culture of this faith.”⁴²⁰ This is related to the “messianic structure” which transcends messianisms and all “determinate figures and forms of the Messiah.”⁴²¹ The moment the messianic structure ceases to be a universal structure it becomes a messianism which privileges a particular tradition over against all others; “you are accrediting one tradition among others and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism.”⁴²² Derrida succinctly describes the

⁴¹⁷ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 57, 59.

⁴¹⁸ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 55.

⁴¹⁹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 57.

⁴²⁰ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 56.

⁴²¹ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 23.

⁴²² Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 23.

messianic structure: “This universal structure of the promise, of the expectation for the future for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice”⁴²³

Since I have been referring to what is anterior in striving to identify where Derrida may locate the sacred, a question arises with regard to the messianic. On the one hand, is the messianic not the “groundless ground” on which “there have been revelations, a history which one calls Judaism or Christianity and so on . . . ?”⁴²⁴ Alternatively, do not these Abrahamic religions, for example, provide “irreducible events of revelation” from which the very notion of the messianic is derived?⁴²⁵ Is, as Caputo phrases it, the notion of the messianic *a priori* or *a posteriori*?⁴²⁶ If the messianic is the latter, then that locates the messianic *within* religious traditions. This means that to associate the sacred with the messianic at the same time locates the sacred where, for Derrida, it is deconstructible and, hence, *not* “immune, safe and sound, untouchable,” that is, not sacred at all. On the other hand, if one considers the messianic *a priori*, then possibly a Derridean notion of the sacred can be *approached*, since then the messianic ceases to be dependent on any historical messianism.

Derrida, himself, asks:

Was not Abrahamic messianism but an exemplary prefiguration, the pre-name [*prénom*] given against the background of the possibility that we are attempting to name here? But then why keep the name, or at least the adjective (we prefer to say *messianic* rather than *messianism*, so as to designate a structure of experience rather than a religion), there where no figure of the *arrivant*, even as he or she is heralded, should be pre-determined, prefigured, or even pre-named?⁴²⁷

In answer, Derrida suggests that “these questions and these hypotheses [in reference to the messianic and messianism] do not exclude each other.”⁴²⁸ Since Derrida’s elaboration consists of adding the following disclaimer, “At least for us and for the moment,”⁴²⁹ there remains the suggestion that the distinction between messianism and messianicity or, alternatively, the compatibility of the two, is not easily sustainable on either side of the

⁴²³ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 23.

⁴²⁴ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 23.

⁴²⁵ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 23-24 and Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 168-69.

⁴²⁶ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 169.

⁴²⁷ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 210-11.

⁴²⁸ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 211.

⁴²⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 211.

equation. Caputo specifically addresses what Derrida might mean in *Specters of Marx* when he says “the two hypotheses do not exclude each other.”⁴³⁰

I take this as follows. It may well be that, in the order of being (*ordo essendi*), the messianic is the formal condition of possibility of the concrete messianisms, even while, in the order of knowing (*ordo cognoscendi*), of how we actually learn about it, the historical messianisms are the only way we have come to learn about the structure of the messianic in general. What is first in the order of being is last in the order of knowing.⁴³¹

This is merely to say that we can only come to know about the messianic via messianism, but that the messianic is nevertheless the foundational idea, i.e. *a priori*.

Beyond this, Caputo suggests that Derrida “as he has gotten to be an older man” is inscribing a kind of Judaism in his work, “if not very Jewish, at least very quasi-Jewish, or hyper-Jewish, or meta-Jewish, certainly not Jewish in the conventional sense”⁴³² Caputo states that as Derrida advanced in years he became more conscious of the notion of “dying” and of his Judaic roots. He became “more autobiographical, more auto-bio-thanatographical.”⁴³³ Despite the fact that Caputo strives to denude Derrida’s “Judaism” of its religiosity, it nevertheless seems to be cloaked in just that (even though the external manifestations of the religious—festivals, sacrifices and so forth—are critiqued):

For whatever parts of Judaism Derrida has deserted (or have deserted him) and let die away, he has been engaged all along in reinventing a certain Judaism, let us say, a prophetic Judaism, the Judaism that constitutes a prophetic call for justice, but not the Judaism of religious ritual and sacrifice or even of specific doctrines. Amos has Yahweh say that He [*sic*] takes no delight in festivals, solemn assemblies, or burnt offerings, but in justice That is the Judaism that Derrida invokes, the *alliance* to which he has remained faithful, to which he calls “come,” which he would let come, let come again—this time as deconstruction.⁴³⁴

Has Derrida, then, revisited Judaism and re-claimed a sort of sacred inheritance, namely, the messianic, albeit “re-invented” or “re-inscribed” as the coming of deconstruction or, possibly, in other words, the coming of justice?

In answering this question, I would like to note Derrida’s introduction of the messianic (and *khôra*) in “Faith and Knowledge”: “. . . let us refer—*provisionally*, I emphasise this, and for pedagogical or rhetorical reasons—first to the ‘messianic’, and

⁴³⁰ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 211, quoted in Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 170.

⁴³¹ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 170.

⁴³² Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 171.

⁴³³ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 171.

⁴³⁴ Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 172.

second to the *chora*,⁴³⁵ as I have tried to do more minutely, more patiently and, I hope, more rigorously elsewhere.”⁴³⁶ If Derrida’s use of the term “messianic” is “for pedagogical or rhetorical reasons” then the point, at least in this context, is not the messianic *per se*, but that which is explicated by the use of the term. I note once again some of the ideas that Derrida associates with the messianic: faith, justice, promise, hope, and the coming of the other. The (Judaic) notion of the messiah is an *inheritance* for Derrida, but it is not a *sacred* one. In the first place, it is an idea that Derrida *appropriates* because it allows him, in a single word (concept), to express a relatively complex structure that is descriptive of deconstruction from a particular angle. Derrida, from what I can ascertain, is not primarily interested in notions of the messiah in Judaism (or any of the Abrahamic religions), quite the contrary.

In fact, if these messianisms were to become entangled in messianicity, it would result in a misunderstanding of Derrida’s messianic. There is distinction between messianicity and messianism: “Between the two possibilities I must confess I oscillate and I think some other scheme has to be constructed to understand the two at the same time, to do justice to the two possibilities.”⁴³⁷ He then continues: “That is why—and perhaps this is not a good reason, perhaps one day I will give this up—for the time being I keep the word ‘messianic’.”⁴³⁸ This latter sentence is scarcely descriptive of something “sacred.” The sacred, for Derrida, then, cannot be clearly identified with the messianic itself, but rather, if it is there at all, is in that to which Derrida alludes via the messianic. With this in mind, I would like to examine an associated idea: hospitality.

Derrida, at one point, names hospitality the “messianic surprise” in that hospitality “consists in welcoming the other that does not warn me of his [*sic*] coming.”⁴³⁹ If one awaits the coming of the other (the messiah) then one also has to contend with the *manner* in which one waits. If one *yearns* for the coming of the messiah, then one would at the same time be prepared to *welcome* the messiah on his/her/its arrival. The messianic nature of Derrida’s

⁴³⁵ This is the translator’s spelling of what I have spelled as *khôra*—there is no intended distinction in meaning.

⁴³⁶ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 56.

⁴³⁷ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 24.

⁴³⁸ Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 24.

⁴³⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” in *Acts of Religion*, ed. and trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 381.

description of hospitality is self-evident with regard to *waiting for the coming of the other and the inevitable preparation and anticipation related to this expectation*:

Indeed, *on the one hand*, hospitality must wait, extend itself toward the other, extend to the other the gifts, the site, the shelter, the cover; it must be ready to welcome [*accueillir*], to host shelter, to give shelter and cover; it must prepare itself and adorn itself [*se préparer et se parer*] for the coming of the *hôte*; it must even develop itself into a culture of hospitality, multiply the signs of anticipation, construct and institute what one calls structures of welcoming [*les structures de l'accueil*], a welcoming apparatus [*les structures d'accueil*].⁴⁴⁰

But the *other hand* of this description also reveals the indeterminate nature of the one who is coming. This lack of a determination is what distinguishes, as already noted, messianicity from messianism:

But, *on the other hand*, the opposite is also nevertheless true, simultaneously, and irrepressibly true: to be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken [*surprendre*], *to be ready to not be ready*, if such is possible, to let oneself be overtaken, to not even *let* oneself be overtaken, to be surprised, in a fashion almost violent, violated and raped [*voilée*], stolen [*volée*], . . . precisely where one is not ready to receive—and not only *not yet ready* but *not ready, unprepared* in a mode that is not even that of the ‘not yet’.⁴⁴¹

The messianic incorporates the *danger* of “not being ready,” the idea that one can never be fully prepared for what is coming, since the messiah (the wholly other) is not related to any determined coming. It is not a repetition of the same, something derived from prior experience and belief systems. It is dependent on “faith,” that is, borne of a radical *unknowing*.

Interestingly, the word “sacred” also occurs in relation to hospitality when Derrida examines Louis Massignon’s notion of “sacred hospitality.” Certain ideas converge here. First, Massignon is drawn by the Islamic command related to hospitality characterised by Abraham’s response to the three visitors, biblically found in Genesis 18:2. It is Islam and not Christianity (or Judaism) that is “the exemplary heir of the Abrahamic tradition.”⁴⁴²

The European no longer understands that, thanks to the heroic manner in which he has practiced the notion of hospitality, Abraham deserved as his inheritance not only the Holy Land but also entering in it of all the foreign *hôtes* who are “blessed” by his hospitality. . . . Abraham’s hospitality is the sign announcing the final completion of the gathering of all nations, all blessed in Abraham, in this Holy Land that must be monopolized by none. . . . The

⁴⁴⁰ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 360-61.

⁴⁴¹ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 361.

⁴⁴² Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 370.

Qur'an mentions three times (XI, 72; XV, 51; LI, 24) the passage from Genesis (18:1-33).⁴⁴³ It is from this fundamental text⁴⁴⁴ that Islam has deduced the principle of *iqra* (*dakhalk, jiwār*), right of hospitality, *ikram al dayf*, respect of the human person, of the *hôte* sent by God.⁴⁴⁵

Second, Massignon's explication of sacred hospitality is not "a neutral and expert discourse of exegetical knowledge"⁴⁴⁶ and his "language of sacred hospitality is inseparable from an experience . . . of homosexuality."⁴⁴⁷ Although Massignon was married with children "his life was marked by . . . homosexuality."⁴⁴⁸ Furthermore, it was amongst Muslim associates and friends that he encountered greater acceptance. For example, his most significant homoerotic friendship was with Luis de Cuadra, a scholar of Islam:

De Cuadra had chosen to leave his Catholic upbringing [I note at this point that Massignon was a Catholic and despite his passion for Islam, never converted] and embrace Islam, where the approach to same-sex eros was in some ways more hospitable and the homes of strangers were more open to gay and bisexual men than in the Christianity of his origins.⁴⁴⁹

Of course, Massignon's sexual orientation and resultant predisposition to find reasons for a more exemplary hospitality in Islam in response to Christian homophobia does not invalidate his arguments.

Derrida examines Massignon's sacred hospitality with regard to "two motifs of *substitution* and of *hostage*."⁴⁵⁰ Quoting J. K. Huysman (who was greatly admired by

⁴⁴³ Gil Anidjar—the translator of Derrida's text—precisely quotes the three Islamic references to Genesis 18:1-33. Derrida, "Hostipitality," 371n25. These three references are short (a few lines each), somewhat oblique and certainly do not constitute a retelling of the story. This does not alter the principal point, however, which is that Islam has specifically appropriated this idea of Abrahamic hospitality.

⁴⁴⁴ Derrida observes that the "fundamental text" is not found in the Qu'ran as one might expect, but it is rather Genesis 18:1-33 that is "often quoted by Massignon." Derrida, "Hostipitality," 371.

⁴⁴⁵ Louis Massignon, quoted in Pierre Rocalve, *Louis Massignon et l'islam* (Damascus: Institut Français, 1993), 33, quoted in Derrida, "Hostipitality," 370-71.

⁴⁴⁶ Derrida, "Hostipitality," 374.

⁴⁴⁷ Derrida, "Hostipitality," 375.

⁴⁴⁸ Cleo McNelly Kearns, "Mary, Maternity and Abrahamic Hospitality in Derrida's Reading of Massignon," in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood & Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005), 83.

⁴⁴⁹ Kearns, 83. Kearns adds the following disclaimer in the endnotes: "I do not wish to imply that the Islam of Massignon's experience was free from homophobia. Indeed, Massignon experienced ridicule and even danger on account of his sexual orientation The theology and structure of Islam, however, do not institutionalize homophobia in quite the way that Catholicism does." Kearns, 93n16.

⁴⁵⁰ Derrida, "Hostipitality," 375.

Massignon), Derrida outlines “the doctrine of ‘mystical substitution’” that “will be found everywhere in Massignon’s spiritual itinerary.”⁴⁵¹

Humanity is governed by two laws that it ignores in its carelessness: the law of solidarity in evil, the law of reversibility in the good: solidarity in Adam, reversibility in Our Lord. Otherwise put, up to a point, each is responsible for the faults of the others, and must also, up to a point expiate them. . . . God first submitted to these laws when he applied them to himself in the person of the Son. . . . He wanted for Jesus to give the first example of mystical substitution, the substitution [*suppléance*] of him who owes nothing for him who owes everything. . . .⁴⁵²

Anselmian ideas of penal substitution, as well as various later derivatives thereof could be recognised in this description. Notably the phrase “solidarity with Adam, reversibility of Our Lord” carries the implication that all people have “solidarity with Adam” in that they have to die, while this death penalty is “reversed” in Christ—a possible reading of, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:22: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (NIV). This soteriological reading of Massignon’s substitution, however, misses the principal thrust, which is better recognised in the phrase: “. . . each is responsible for the faults of others, and must up to a point expiate them” This subjective component of the substitution idea is also evident in the fact that Jesus serves as “the first example of mystical substitution.” Each person, following the example of Christ, is responsible to substitute their own concerns for those of the other. The issue, in this sense, is one of hospitality, not soteriology, and sacred hospitality is something that, although exemplified in Christ, is not unique to Christ.

Massignon’s second motif, that of the *hostage*, assists in identifying “who they are” and “who we are.”

“We offer as a pledge”—this is what the word *hostage* means—but as pledge, voluntary prisoners, guarded hôtes, in a kind of captivity or spiritual residency, in a foreign milieu that we respect, namely, Islam; a milieu that we want to bring back to the truth to which it is itself the heir and the trustee. Hostages, we offer ourselves as hostages—this means: we substitute ourselves for the other . . . a duty which is not that of converting Muslims . . . but rather of awakening, in the Muslim people who are cut off and excluded, the truth of Christ, of the sacred face of Christ, of which this Muslim people keeps an imprint, even if it keeps an imperfect tradition.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 376.

⁴⁵² Charles Destremau and Jean Moncelon, *Massignon* (Paris: Plon, 1994), 23, quoted in Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 376.

⁴⁵³ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 376-77.

It should be noted that “the word *hostage*, always emphasized, is applied by Massignon to himself.”⁴⁵⁴ Massignon is the guest (*hôte*) who places himself in the trusted hands of Muslim people, representing the religion (Islam) that most closely exemplifies Abrahamic (sacred) hospitality, by which he hopes to “awaken” them to the “truth of Christ.”⁴⁵⁵

Derrida’s interest is obviously not to be aligned with that of Massignon’s in the sense of his affinity for Islam or his muted acclamation of the “truth of Christ” in a form of Catholicism. While it is true that Massignon’s sacred hospitality finds its exemplars in stories of the “divine”—the three angels come to Abraham; the Son of God comes to this earth; Mary provides her womb for Jesus—the *sacred* is to be recognised in the other, the stranger, the *hôte*.

Derrida further suggests that forgiveness is “hospitality par excellence.”

Forgiving would be opening for and smiling to the other, whatever [their] fault or [their] indignity, whatever the offense or even the threat. Whoever asks for hospitality, asks, in a way, for forgiveness and whoever offers hospitality, grants forgiveness—and forgiveness must be infinite or it is nothing: it is excuse or exchange.⁴⁵⁶

Forgiveness, like hospitality, requires at least two—one, and the other; the one who asks for forgiveness and the other; the one who grants forgiveness and the other. Like hospitality, Derrida explores forgiveness with regard to both its necessity and its impossibility. This he expounds with reference to a “Jewish joke”: “Two Jews, longtime enemies, meet at the synagogue, on the Day of Atonement [*le jour du Grand Pardon*—in French ‘le Grand Pardon’ means both Yom Kippur and ‘the great forgiveness’].⁴⁵⁷ One says to the other [as a gesture of forgiveness]:⁴⁵⁸ ‘I wish for you what you wish for me.’ The other immediately retorts: ‘Already you’re starting with me?’”⁴⁵⁹ Derrida’s first response to this joke is pithy and descriptive of his exposition of forgiveness:

⁴⁵⁴ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 379.

⁴⁵⁵ Massignon does not consider this to be proselytising in the direct sense: “The ‘conversion’ of these souls, yes, it is the goal, but it is for them to find it themselves, without their suffering our insistence as an external pressure. It must be the secret birth of a love, shared love . . .” Louis Massignon, *L’hospitalité sacrée* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1987), 208, quoted in Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 376.

⁴⁵⁶ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 380.

⁴⁵⁷ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 381n43.

⁴⁵⁸ This insertion is Derrida’s.

⁴⁵⁹ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 381.

An unfathomable story, a story that seems to stop on the verge of itself, a story whose development consists in interrupting itself, in paralyzing itself in order to refuse itself all *avenir*; absolute story of the unsolvable, vertiginous depth of the bottomless [*san-fond*], irresistible whirlpool that carries forgiveness, the gift, and the re-giving, the re-dealing of forgiveness, to the abyss of impossibility.⁴⁶⁰

This connection between forgiveness and hospitality is more obviously evident with regard to Levinas's understanding of the cities of refuge⁴⁶¹ (Deuteronomy 19). Here "the involuntary murderer is welcomed,"⁴⁶² although it should be noted that while the cities are hospitable sites, they are not directly sites of forgiveness. Rather one could say that the murderer, at best, *awaits* forgiveness (or the possibility of forgiveness) and the site grants "respite, an excuse, a relative and temporary absolution."⁴⁶³ However, Derrida asserts with regard to the cities of refuge that "what is clear . . . is that the *hôte* or stranger is holy, divine, protected by divine blessing."⁴⁶⁴

The idea of the holiness of the *hôte* is descriptive of what is intended by Massignon's sacred hospitality, which has been described as "the experiential discovery of the sacred in others and, in response, of holiness in oneself."⁴⁶⁵ The two sides of hospitality, the host and the guest, are evident in the word *hôte*, which "is both the one who gives, *donne*, and the one who receives, *reçoit*, hospitality."⁴⁶⁶ To reduce or translate *hôte* as either "guest" or "host" is to ignore Derrida's portmanteau: *hostipitalité*. As Gil Anidjar notes, with hospitality there is always the threat of "violence that is constitutive of it"—"the notion of *hostis* as host or as enemy."⁴⁶⁷ In this regard, though, hospitality should be extended to the other/the *hôte*/the stranger. Of course, any act of violence would automatically unmask the other—their intentions, their identity (as criminals, for example)—and they would in the same moment

⁴⁶⁰ Derrida, "Hostipitality," 381.

⁴⁶¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "Cities of Refuge," in *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 34-52, quoted in Derrida, "Hostipitality," 400n58.

⁴⁶² Derrida, "Hostipitality," 401.

⁴⁶³ Derrida, "Hostipitality," 401.

⁴⁶⁴ Derrida, "Hostipitality," 401.

⁴⁶⁵ Christopher Bamford, "Sacred Hospitality," *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Bulletin* 73 (October 2004), under "Part 1," <http://www.monasticdialog.com/bulletins/73/bamford1.htm> (accessed May 17, 2011).

⁴⁶⁶ Gil Anidjar, "A Note on 'Hostipitality,'" in *Acts of Religion*, ed. and trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 356.

⁴⁶⁷ Anidjar, "Note on 'Hostipitality,'" 356. See also Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 109-113.

cease to be the other/the *hôte*/the stranger, i.e. the participants of hospitality (whether guest or host).

With regard to the cities of refuge, the involuntary murderer is granted a home—hospitality—until his/her “identity” is revealed. The moment the involuntary murderer is found to be innocent or guilty (perhaps as a voluntary murderer), the city of refuge ceases to be a place that extends hospitality. The innocent can go home without fear of retribution and the guilty will be sentenced for their crime. As long as the involuntary murderer is the *hôte* and this will remain while they remain identified with the other and the stranger, the city of refuge will remain a city of refuge.

The other is sacred while the other is other. The moment the other becomes a repetition of the same, something that is calculated and understood, a determination that is present, in effect, something that identifies itself in opposition to anything that is other, then this other ceases to be other. The ideas, words and concepts that Derrida uses—messianicity without messianism, justice (that never comes but is demanded today), hospitality (its necessity and impossibility), apocalypse without apocalypse, forgiveness (its necessity and impossibility) and faith (without religion)—all preserve the alterity of the other and in this preservation demonstrate that deconstruction will not touch them. To reiterate, when Derrida says *tout autre est tout autre*, he is, with the emphasis of a tautology, elevating the alterity of the other, perhaps, even, to the point of sacralising.

Since the other is, by virtue of their alterity, not foregrounded, there are at least two necessary steps one must take in order to locate them. The first is to undermine the very concept of a centre. The second requires a kind of flattening out, or a formlessness that undergirds everything. To accomplish this I have recourse to *khôra*. One needs a point of departure that is not really a “point.” Or to approach this from the other side (and with regard to the creation narrative), one should not begin by identifying the point or the purpose of creation. This is to locate the centre at the outset. For instance, in SDA circles one could assert, “the Sabbath is the goal of creation” or possibly, “Adam is the pinnacle of creation.” Without critiquing the reasons or the intent of such theological claims, these ideas destroy the natural association of *play* with creation. Creation begins with no reference, literally nothing. It is with this in mind, that I turn *khôra*, which could be called a pre-originary condition—formless and void—that provides a receptacle for everything that exists. *Khôra*, then, is a point of departure that is not really a point, not really a centre.

2. *Khôra*

Khôra is the “first name prior to all naming.”⁴⁶⁸ This paradoxical definition has the intent of finding a “location” for *khôra* that is prior to not only everything that is, but also everything we use to describe everything that is—speech, language, words, concepts, discourse. This is why *khôra* is difficult to explain. It does not belong in the realm of explanation. It is, rather, the desertification of all reference that by its total kenosis of everything that exists or can be thought to exist, sensible and intelligible, with no inside or outside, accepts without judgment anything and everything and, even, nothing. In this sense, *khôra* exemplifies hospitality.

Derrida speaks of *khôra* as “the place of bifurcation between two approaches to the desert.”⁴⁶⁹ *Khôra* has an origin in discourse that is Abrahamic and Platonic, via Western philosophic tradition, and its association with Christianity and negative theology. This does not locate the origin of *khôra*, but this element of hybridisation is, perhaps, helpful, since it provides points of reference for a discourse on *khôra*.⁴⁷⁰

Khôra is something other than that which is located in binaries, it is something other than “that logic of binarity, of the yes or no.”⁴⁷¹ Extracting the idea from the *Timaeus*,⁴⁷² Derrida refers to “the *khôra*”⁴⁷³ as a “third genus” which is neither “sensible” nor “intelligible.” This “third genus” (*triton genos*) should not be understood as the third in a group of three things that belong to the same family, as though it is a third order of “being” unlike, but sharing some common familial association with the first two (“sensible” and “intelligible”). It “is *here* only a *philosophical* way of naming an *X* that is not included in a group, a family, a triad, or a trinity.”⁴⁷⁴ In the *Timaeus* there is an “alternation between the

⁴⁶⁸ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 57.

⁴⁶⁹ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 57.

⁴⁷⁰ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 57-58.

⁴⁷¹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 89.

⁴⁷² For the sake of clarity, I have followed a basic convention: the *Timaeus* refers to Plato’s book, while *Timaeus* (without the article or emphasis) refers to the character in the book.

⁴⁷³ The definite article is not incidental and it will become necessary to distinguish between “*khôra*” and “the *khôra*.”

⁴⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans. Ken Frieden and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2:175.

logic of exclusion and that of participation” in that the *khôra* can designate “neither this nor that” or “both this and that.” This Derrida suggests “stems perhaps only from a provisional appearance and from the constraints of rhetoric, even from some incapacity for naming.”⁴⁷⁵ Timaeus suggests that to say that the *khôra* “participates” in the intelligible in an “aporetic way” would not be “lying or saying what is false”⁴⁷⁶—a negative formulation which need not equate to telling the truth. I will use an (inadequate) example to try to point to what *might* be meant by this. In apartheid South Africa there was an attempt to classify racial types in terms of “black” and “white.” The colonial meeting between the European and the indigenous African peoples caused an immediate hybridisation, not merely biologically, but by virtue of the interaction itself. This means that strictly speaking *no-one* is black and *no-one* is white—different people “mutually constitute” one another when they meet. Hence, people are “neither this nor that”—neither purely black nor purely white, but rather a hybridisation of the two. This hybridisation of black and white then lends itself to the conclusion that people are not black *or* white but are “both this and that,” i.e. both black and white. The double negation (neither this nor that) has allowed one to form a positive affirmation. However, this proves to be inadequate as well, because the designation presumes categories not in evidence. Since *nobody* is black or white, there is no such thing as black and there is no such thing as white, so to describe some-one as both black and white (because of hybridisation) is merely to take two non-existent categories and combine them into a category which logically cannot exist either. Hence, one lands in the desert, a place (*khôra*, if you like) that has no reference. It is for this reason that the *triton genos* is not a “third” at all (by virtue of being preceded by a binary), nor does it share an alignment with any binary that it is perceived to have deposed.

Continuing with Derrida’s essay, the *khôra* is not to be accessed through the alternatives of *logos* or *mythos*.⁴⁷⁷ It is appropriate at this juncture to consider the way these alternatives (*logos* and *mythos*) appear to function in SDA readings of Genesis 1. In these interpretations there is a prioritising of *logos* (specifically that the days of creation are literal, historical, consecutive and 24 hours in length) over *mythos* (story) that could be noted as questionable with regard to interpretations of stories in general. Genesis 1, strictly speaking, is not a theological argument that demands coherence; it is a story (*mythos*). To refer to Genesis 1 as *mythos* does not speak to its historical validity (or lack thereof); rather it is the

⁴⁷⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 89.

⁴⁷⁶ Plato, 51b, quoted in Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 90.

⁴⁷⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 90.

nature of the text. Certain strands of Adventism wish to govern this *mythos* with their own particular *logos*, but one could argue that just as *khôra* cannot be accessed through the alternatives of *logos* or *mythos*, neither should *mythos* (in this case, Genesis 1) be accessed or, at least, defined in any ultimate sense, by some or other *logos* (literal days).

Derrida notes that *khôra* “does not proceed from the natural or legitimate *logos*, but rather from a hybrid, bastard, or even corrupted reasoning [*logismo notho*]” and “comes as ‘in a dream’.”⁴⁷⁸ The *khôra* does not belong, even obscurely, to any dichotomous or dialectical logic. It does not belong to any order of being or logic that is situated by creation. This is why the *khôra* cannot arise from the logic of binaries. It is pre-originary:

At the moment, so to speak, when the demiurge organizes the cosmos, by cutting, introducing, and impressing the images of the models “in” the *khôra*, the latter must already have been there, as the “there” itself, outside of time or in any case outside of becoming, in an outside-time without common measure with the eternity of ideas and becoming of sensible things.⁴⁷⁹

Derrida asks: “What if this thought calls *also* for a third genus of discourse? And what if, perhaps as in the case of the *khôra*, this appeal to the third genre was only the moment of a detour in order to signal toward a genre beyond genre?”⁴⁸⁰ How “is one to think the necessity of that which while *giving place* to that opposition [*mythos* and *logos*] as to so many others, seems sometimes to be itself no longer subject to the law of the very thing which it *situates*?”⁴⁸¹ Rephrasing this, the *khôra* “gives place” for discourse whether *mythos* or *logos*, but in so doing displaces both of these making way for a “third genre” that cannot be aligned with either *mythos* or *logos*. The *khôra* oscillates not between two poles, but between two kinds of oscillation (neither/nor and both/and). Concerned with existent things (sensible/intelligible; visible/invisible, form/formless), it is displaced “towards types of discourse (*mythos/logos*) or of relation to what is or is not in general.”⁴⁸² This displacement “depends on a sort of metonymy: such a metonymy would displace itself, by displacing the names, from types [*genres*] of being to types [*genre*] of discourse.”⁴⁸³ But it is difficult to separate the two since “the discourse, like the relation to that which is in general, is qualified

⁴⁷⁸ Plato, 52b, quoted in Derrida, *Khôra*, 90.

⁴⁷⁹ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 171.

⁴⁸⁰ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 90.

⁴⁸¹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 90.

⁴⁸² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 91.

⁴⁸³ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 91.

or disqualified by what it relates to.” Hence, “the discourse on the *khôra* is also a discourse on genre/type (*genos*) and on different types of type.”⁴⁸⁴ To follow this, one needs to appreciate that the *Timaeus* is not merely a narrative of the creation of the world and everything that “is,” it is also a commentary on the nature of discourse and how we refer to or talk about what is created. The *khôra* situates language and so cannot be defined by that which it situates. It is neither part of creation nor is it the signifiers used to describe the signified and since it cannot be signified, it is not related to the genres of either *mythos* or *logos*. It is a third genre beyond genre.⁴⁸⁵

The *khôra* is also indicated as a sexual type, since Timaeus speaks of “mother”⁴⁸⁶ and “nurse.”⁴⁸⁷ Derrida notes in this regard that translators refer to “metaphors, images and simile.”⁴⁸⁸ The problem is that even though these ideas are “useful” they, themselves, are “built upon this distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, which is precisely what the thought of the *khôra* can no longer get along with.”⁴⁸⁹ The problem is one of rhetoric, but also of pedagogy, since the significance of the *khôra* is not merely a pedagogical device—“those who speak of metaphor” refer to the *khôra* as just a “didactic metaphor.”⁴⁹⁰ The *khôra* cannot be assigned such a place of residence: “it is necessary to avoid speaking of *khôra* as ‘something’ that is or is not, that would be present or absent, intelligible, sensible, or both at once, active or passive, Good (*epekeina tes ousias*) or Evil, God or man, living or nonliving.”⁴⁹¹ It is “more situating than situated, an opposition which must in its turn be shielded from some grammatical or ontological alternative between the active and the passive.”⁴⁹² The *khôra* as metaphor is to be avoided, not so that it should be understood as “properly a mother, a nurse, a receptacle, a bearer of imprints of gold,”⁴⁹³ since it is beyond

⁴⁸⁴ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 91.

⁴⁸⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 91.

⁴⁸⁶ For example, Plato, 51a.

⁴⁸⁷ For example, Plato, 49a.

⁴⁸⁸ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 91.

⁴⁸⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 91-92.

⁴⁹⁰ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 92.

⁴⁹¹ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 173.

⁴⁹² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 92.

⁴⁹³ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 92.

this type of polarity (metaphorical or proper): “Giving place to oppositions, it would itself not submit to any reversal” and this is not because “it would be unalterability *itself* beyond its name but because in carrying beyond the polarity of sense (metaphorical and proper), it would no longer belong to the horizon of sense, nor to that of meaning as the meaning of being.”⁴⁹⁴

The dilemma is that all translations “remain caught in networks of interpretations” whether the word *khôra* itself (“place,” “location,” “region,” “country”) or “what tradition calls the figures—comparisons, imprints, images and metaphors—proposed by Timaeus (‘mother,’ ‘nurse,’ ‘receptacle,’ ‘imprint-bearer’).” These Derrida suggests “are led astray by retrospective projections, which can always be suspected of being anachronistic.” In other words, the Greek word “*khôra*” requires translating (obviously), but then one is forced to translate it into the language of our context and time, which is exactly where *khôra* does not belong. Derrida notes: “We would never claim to propose the exact word, the *mot juste*, for *khôra*, nor to name it, *itself*, over and above all the turns and detours of rhetoric, nor finally to approach, *itself*, for what it will have been, outside of any point of view, outside of any anachronic perspective.”⁴⁹⁵

Derrida suggests that there is a “structural law” in the *Timaeus* which has never been “approached *as such* by the whole history of interpretations of the *Timaeus*.” It is this structure that makes tropology and anachronism “inevitable.” It is to do with structure since the *essence* of the *khôra* lacks meaning: “The *khôra* is anachronistic; it ‘is’ the anachrony within being, or better: the anachrony of being. It anachronizes being.” That is, the *khôra* is not present and is always out of step with any presence, and that which is inscribed on it always has its own historical context (the word *khôra*, for example), which does not rightly belong to the *khôra* at all, *but* it is located in the *Timaeus*, it is placed in context within the structure of the *Timaeus*.⁴⁹⁶

Derrida proposes a hypothesis with regard to this “structural anachronism.” If one were to gather together the huge body of literature that constitutes what has been written in response to the *Timaeus*, there is no real possibility of “totalizing it in some ordered apprehension,” but “such an order (grouping, unity, totality organized around a *telos*) has an

⁴⁹⁴ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 92-93.

⁴⁹⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 93.

⁴⁹⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 94.

essential link with the structural anachronism” already mentioned and is “the inevitable effect produced by *something like the khôra*.”⁴⁹⁷

All the interpretations give form to *khôra* by “determining” it; “by leaving on it the schematic mark of their imprint and by depositing on it the sediment of their contribution.” However, *khôra* is not reached or touched or shaped by these interpretations, nor does *khôra* provide “the support of a stable substratum or substance.” *Khôra* “is not the subject,” nor can “hermeneutic types . . . give form to *khôra*.” Derrida describes *khôra* as “amorphous” and “virgin, with a virginity that is radically rebellious against anthropomorphism.” The fact that Timaeus uses the terms “receptacle” (*dekhomenon*) and “place” (*khôra*) should not cause one to ascribe to *khôra* “an essence, the stable being of an *eidos*,”⁴⁹⁸ since *khôra* is neither of the order of the *eidos* nor of the order of mimemes, that is, of images of the *eidos* which come to imprint themselves in it.” *Khôra* is not and its “nonbeing” can be *conceived* “via the anthropomorphic schemas of the verb *to receive* and the verb *to give*.”⁴⁹⁹

This receiving can be understood in Plato’s terminology as the receiving of the receptacle.⁵⁰⁰ But, this terminology should not lead one to glibly conceive of the *khôra* as some sort of indiscriminate container of that which it receives:

If the *khôra* receives everything, it does not do this in the manner of a medium [*milieu*] or a container or even a receptacle, because the receptacle is a figure inscribed in it. It is not an intelligible extension, in the Cartesian sense, receptive subject, in the Kantian sense of *intuitus derivatives*, or a pure sensible space as a form of receptivity.⁵⁰¹

In any case, the translation “receptacle” is problematic at the outset, especially in the manner it *may* be understood, since it is normally thought of as a *container that has an inside and an outside*, which is exactly the sort of binary that *khôra* cannot abide.

Derrida shifts from using “*the khôra*” to just “*khôra*.” “The definite article presupposes the existence of a thing,”⁵⁰² whereas *khôra* intends no such designation. It “is

⁴⁹⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 94.

⁴⁹⁸ *Eidos* may be taken to mean any determined “thing” whether sensible or intelligible.

⁴⁹⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 95.

⁵⁰⁰ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 95.

⁵⁰¹ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 173.

⁵⁰² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 96.

neither sensible nor intelligible.”⁵⁰³ “There is *khôra*,” says Derrida, but, “what there is, there is not.”⁵⁰⁴ Whatever this “there is” actually is, “it will be risky to see in it the equivalent of an *es gibt*, of the *es gibt* which remains without a doubt implicated in every negative theology, unless it is the *es gibt* which always summons negative theology in its Christian history.”⁵⁰⁵ Derrida objects to the *es gibt* that “announces or recalls too much of the dispensation of God, of man, or even that of Being of which certain of Heidegger’s texts speak (*es gibt Sein*).”⁵⁰⁶ *Khôra* is necessarily “indifferent,”⁵⁰⁷ and one must be cautious how one even thinks the notion of *giving* place implied by Plato’s descriptive term “receptacle.” *Khôra* does not “give” as though it is *gracious* and through this grace bestows some “thing” or some “non-thing.” “Radically inhuman and atheological, one cannot even say that it *gives* place or that there is [*il y a*] the *khôra*.”⁵⁰⁸

Khôra, as opposed to *the khôra*, is still a proper name, a word and a feminine name which would seem to be an anthropomorphism, but the properties of *khôra* must resist “those of a determinate existence.” Images/analogies/descriptions/significations that associate *khôra* with “an existent female gender” should not be “attributed to it/her as a property, something of her own.”⁵⁰⁹

Khôra, then, is an *appellation* that is used to “avoid confusion” in that it supplies a consistent rhetorical device (though it is not merely an empty figure), “not so much to ‘give her always the same name’ . . . but to speak of it/her and to call it/her *in the same manner*. In short, faithfully even if this *faith* is irreducible to every other.” *Khôra*, then, is distinct from all philosophemes, or stands “beyond all given philosophemes” but “will have left a *trace* in language, for example, the word *khôra* in the Greek language, insofar as it is caught up in the network of its usual meanings.” In short, Plato needed a word, and “had no other,” and one could add along with the word, “grammatical, rhetorical, logical, and hence also

⁵⁰³ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 96.

⁵⁰⁴ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 96.

⁵⁰⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 96. Derrida is primarily referencing Heidegger with the notion of *es gibt* (usually translated as “there is,” but also more literally as “it gives”). The “*es*” refers to nothing actual which is possibly why Derrida has recourse to this idea with reference to the indefinable nature of *khôra*.

⁵⁰⁶ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 173.

⁵⁰⁷ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 173.

⁵⁰⁸ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 175.

⁵⁰⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 97-98.

philosophical possibilities,” and not merely in the Greek language, but “in other languages, in other bodies, in other negativities as well.” But since this trace, which is present by virtue of the fact that the presence (or absence) of everything that is and is not is preceded (though not in a historical sense) by *khôra* or has, by necessity, to presuppose *khôra*, the trace itself cannot lead to a description of *khôra* in terms of the languages that are inscribed on *khôra*. Derrida describes this trace—whether in word, sentence, syntax, rhetoric, grammar, logic or philosopheme—in terms of negation: “However insufficient they may be, they are given, already marked by this unheard-of trace, promised to the trace that has promised nothing.”⁵¹⁰

Due to the negations which perpetuate the discourse on *khôra*, Derrida is concerned to separate this discourse from that of negative theology:

The question now becomes the following: what happens between *on the one hand*, an “experience” such as this one, the experience of the *khôra* that is above all not an experience, if what one understands by this word is a certain relation to presence, whether sensible or intelligible, or even a relation to the presence of the present in general, and, *on the other hand*, what one calls the *via negativa* in its Christian moment?⁵¹¹

One needs to appreciate that the “way of negativity” with regard to *khôra* is not any attempt to arrive at a “positive or true meaning, a Good or a God.”⁵¹² *Khôra* has no reference point to an event, there is no foothold of a promise or a gift, no means of applying negation in order to discover what one can say affirmatively, unless one is to say that *khôra* is wholly other which, in this sense, merely preserves its alterity, still “foreign to the order of presence and absence.”⁵¹³ Hence, “the barren, radically anhuman and atheological nature of this ‘place’ obliges us to speak and to refer to it . . . as to the wholly other that would not even be transcendent, absolutely remote, nor immanent or close.”⁵¹⁴ In the negative theology of Dionysius, “the extreme rigor of the negative hyperbole” tends to move “closer still to the *agathon* [the Good] than to the *khôra*.”⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁰ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 174.

⁵¹¹ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 174.

⁵¹² Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 174.

⁵¹³ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 174-75.

⁵¹⁴ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 174.

⁵¹⁵ Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking,” 175.

Plato, “in a few pages of the *Timaeus*,”⁵¹⁶ which themselves have been reproduced, interpreted, translated, read and re-read interminably producing a virtually endless body of literature, has indicated, via *khôra*, this history of production in advance. Derrida suggests that the following claim with regard to *all* interpretations of *khôra* arise from Plato’s description of *khôra*: “They resemble *what I am saying* about *khôra*; and hence what I am saying about *khôra* gives a commentary, in advance, and describes the law of the whole history of the hermeneutics and the institutions which will be constructed *on this subject*, over this subject.”⁵¹⁷ That is to say, *Timaeus* is talking about that which gives space to discourse—*khôra*—which by necessity precedes discourse and in the same way, these “few pages of the *Timaeus*” precede (and allow for or “give space for”) the (Platonic) discourse on *khôra*.

The “cosmogony of the *Timaeus* runs through the cycle of knowledge on all things.”⁵¹⁸ It has an “encyclopaedic end”⁵¹⁹ which incorporates everything that “is” whether sensible or intelligible: “And now at length we may say that our discourse concerning the Universe has reached its termination.”⁵²⁰ And yet the discourse on *khôra* occurs halfway through the *Timaeus*, “between the sensible and the intelligible, belonging neither to one nor to the other, hence neither to the cosmos as sensible god nor to the intelligible god, an apparently empty space—even though it is no doubt not *emptiness*.”⁵²¹ But Derrida does not want to align *khôra* with the “chasm” between the intelligible and sensible as the chaos from which the stability of creation stands in contrast. He does, however, argue that *khôra*, in its location in the *Timaeus*

is indeed a chasm in the middle of the book, a sort of abyss ‘in’ which there is an attempt to think or say this abyssal chasm which would be *khôra*, the opening of a place ‘in’ which everything would, at the same time, come to take *place* and *be reflected* (for these are the images which are inscribed there).⁵²²

⁵¹⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 99.

⁵¹⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 99. Derrida is not quoting from the *Timaeus*, but rather suggests that this is what “some-one (Plato, *Timaeus* etc.) would have said.” Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 99.

⁵¹⁸ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 103.

⁵¹⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 103.

⁵²⁰ Plato, 92b, quoted in Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 103.

⁵²¹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 103.

⁵²² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 104.

The structure of the *Timaeus* as an explication of *khôra*, beyond the specific words and concepts that are used to describe *khôra*, is a crucial point of departure (detour) for this dissertation, a central decentring theme.

The structure of the chasm in the middle can be paralleled with the role of Socrates in the *Timaeus* in the sense of various *mises en abyme*—which he suggests are “formal analogies.”⁵²³ *Mise en abyme* could be literally translated as “placing in the abyss/chasm” (a phrase which immediately has resonances with *khôra*), but is commonly understood to denote a story in a story, or a play in a play.⁵²⁴ The figure of Socrates in the *Timaeus* is not *khôra* as such, but represents a kind of pre-figuring or analogy of *khôra* in Plato’s text: “Socrates is not *khôra*, but he would look a lot like it/her if it/she were someone or something.”⁵²⁵ This resemblance of Socrates to *khôra* is to do with Socrates’ relation to the poets (*poietikon genus*) and imitators (*mimetikon ethnos*), and the sophists (*ton sophiston genos*), “those who make their trade out of resemblance . . . the genus of those who have no place.”⁵²⁶ But, says Socrates, “you, to whom I am speaking now, you who are also a *genos* (19e), and who belong to the genre of those who *have (a) place*, who take place, by nature and by education. You are thus both philosophers and politicians.”⁵²⁷ Socrates, by pretending to belong to those who don’t have a place, those who also pretend to have a place (poets, imitators and sophists), at the same time denounces them. Just because Socrates resembles them, does not mean he is one of them. But it is only by “belonging to a place and a community, for example, to the *genos* of true citizens, and politicians” that “authorizes the truth of the *logos*, that is, also its political effectivity, its pragmatic and praxical [*praxique*] efficiency.”⁵²⁸ Socrates “gives back the word” or “gives back the floor” to those who have a place (one might say, *genuine* citizens): “You alone have place and can say both the place and the nonplace in truth, and that is why I am going to give you back the floor. In truth, give it to you or leave it to you.”⁵²⁹

⁵²³ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 106.

⁵²⁴ *The Literacy Encyclopaedia*, s.v. “Mise-en-abyme,” <http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=729> (accessed 18 July 2012).

⁵²⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 111.

⁵²⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 108.

⁵²⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 107. This is not a direct quote from the *Timaeus*, rather Derrida summarises and paraphrases Socrates’ speech in order to make his point.

⁵²⁸ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 108.

⁵²⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 108.

Socrates places himself “in a third genus, in a way, neither that of the sophists, poets, and other imitators (*of whom he speaks*), nor that of the philosopher-politicians (*to whom he speaks*, proposing only to listen to them).”⁵³⁰ Here the resemblance to *khôra* takes shape:

[Socrates’] speech is neither his address nor what it addresses. His speech *occurs* in a third genus and in the neutral space or place without a place where everything is marked but which would be “in itself” unmarked. Doesn’t he already resemble what others, later, those very ones to whom he gives the word, will call *khôra*?⁵³¹

“We are in the preamble,” says Derrida, “our preamble on the preamble of the *Timaeus*. There is no serious philosophy in introductions, only mythology, at most, said Hegel.” Clearly Derrida takes issue with Hegel’s position. Thus far, however, in this preamble, “it is not yet a question of *khôra*, at least not of the one that gives place to the measure of the cosmos.” But, and this is Derrida’s point, there is an assigning of places *given place* by the preamble that is not the place for “serious philosophy, but mythology” and this distribution of “the marked places and the unmarked places” is presented “according to a schema analogous to the one which will later order the discourse on *khôra*.” “Socrates *effaces himself*” and thus “situates himself or institutes himself as a *receptive addressee*, let us say, as a *receptacle of all* that will henceforth be inscribed. He declares himself to be *ready and all set* for that, disposed to *receive* everything he’s offered.”⁵³²

Derrida is concerned to explain what this “receive” (*dekhomai*) might mean:

Dekhomai which will determine the relation of *khôra* to everything, which is not herself and which receives (it/she is *pandekhes*,⁵³³ 51a), plays on a whole gamut of senses and connotations: to receive to accept (a deposit, a salary, a present), to welcome, to gather, or even to expect, for example, the gift of hospitality, to be its addressee, as is here the case with Socrates, in a scene of gift and counter-gift. . . . We are still in a system of gift and debt. When we get on to *khôra* as *pandekhes* beyond all anthropomorphy, we shall perhaps glimpse a beyond of the debt.⁵³⁴

Since *khôra* is not actually concerned with “a system of gift and debt” it is clear that Socrates resembles *khôra* but is not synonymous with *khôra*. For the moment, though, taking into account this location in the preamble of the *Timaeus*, this resemblance is not merely

⁵³⁰ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 109.

⁵³¹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 109.

⁵³² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 110.

⁵³³ *Pandekhes* is derived from *dekhomai* (indicating receiving or reception and, hence, receptacle) and can be translated as a total (*pan*) receptacle (*dekhes*).

⁵³⁴ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 111.

fortuitous. Socrates “answers to his name” and, like *khôra*, his name (or, more precisely, his *appellation*) must be consistent. Also, it is not certain who or what Socrates actually is: “What is place? To what and to whom does it give place? What takes place under these names? Who are you, *Khôra*?”⁵³⁵

The “propositions of the *Timaeus* all seem ordered by a *double motif*”: 1) Myth derives from play and “will not be taken seriously.” Plato “gets in ahead of Aristotle” and “makes use of the opposition play/seriousness (*paidia/spoudé*), in the name of philosophical seriousness;” 2) But, “in the order of becoming” in the absence of a “stable *logos*,” myth is a legitimate alternative; “it is rigor.”⁵³⁶

When one seeks what is probable, “one abandons reasonings on the subject of eternal beings; one seeks what is probable on the subject of becoming.”⁵³⁷ This allows one to play and the *Timaeus* “multiplies propositions of this type.”⁵³⁸

The mythic discourse plays with the probable image because the sensory world is itself (an) image. Sensory becoming is an image, a semblance; myth is an image of this image. The demiurge formed the cosmos *in the image* of the eternal paradigm which he contemplates. The *logos* which relates to these images, to these iconic beings, must be of the same nature: merely probable (29b-c-d).⁵³⁹

But how can the discourse on *khôra* be part of a “probable myth?” Derrida suggests that the discourse on *khôra*, is “an *oneiric* and *bastard* reasoning . . . a sort of myth within a myth.”⁵⁴⁰ In addition, because it “gives thought” to that which is neither sensible being nor intelligible being, “it is neither true nor probable and appears thus to be heterogeneous to myth, at least to mytho-logic, to this philosopho-mytheme which orders myth to its philosophical *telos*.”⁵⁴¹ Hence, although the discourse on *khôra*—the *abyss*—manifests in the middle of the *Timaeus*, it is nevertheless foreshadowed or announced in advance in a “muted” way by “a series of mythic fictions embedded mutually in each other.”⁵⁴² Catherine Osbourne

⁵³⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 111.

⁵³⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 112.

⁵³⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 112.

⁵³⁸ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 112.

⁵³⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 112.

⁵⁴⁰ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 113.

⁵⁴¹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 113.

⁵⁴² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 113.

in “Space, Time, Shape, and Direction: Creative Discourse in the *Timaeus*” is of assistance with regard to this notion of Timaeus’s “probable” or “likely” story. It is not to do with the truth or falsity of the account that refers to the likelihood of the (creation) event itself. Timaeus is indicating “the status of his own account: an account that interprets a subject It is ‘likely’, then, in a rather special sense, in which the term conveys the degree to which it is likened to, or exemplifies, the original rather than the probability regarding whether it might be true or false.”⁵⁴³ This enables one to appreciate the significance of the series of mythic fictions that occur in Socrates’ conversation in the preamble and why Derrida unpacks them so carefully.

These mythic fictions (which are concerned to identify the origins of Athens—an allusion to the creation event to follow), these tales upon tales, are summarised by Derrida into seven distinct fictions (F), “the first three instances of textual fiction are mutually included in one another; each content given form in the receptacle of another: F1, the *Timaeus* itself, a unit(y) that is already difficult to cut up; F2, the conversation the evening before (*The Republic, Politeia*? This debate is well known); and F3, its present résumé, the description of the ideal *politeia*.”⁵⁴⁴ Socrates now “demands that one pass to life, to movement and to reality, in order to speak at last of philosophy and politics” because, he, Socrates, along with the poets, imitators and sophists, is incapable since he has no place.⁵⁴⁵ Hence, young Critias (F4) steps up and recounts “a tale which he had already told the night before, on the road, according to old oral traditions.”⁵⁴⁶ During this tale-telling, “young Critias recounts another tale (F5), which old Critias, his ancestor, had himself told of a conversation which he (said he) had with Solon.”⁵⁴⁷ In this conversation Solon in turn relates a conversation (F6) “which he (said he) had with an Egyptian priest and in the course of which the latter relates (F7) in his turn the origin of Athens: according to Egyptian Scriptures.”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴³ Catherine Osborne, “Space, Time, and Direction: Creative Discourse in the *Timaeus*,” in *An Offprint of Form and Argument in Late Plato*, ed. Christopher Gill and Margaret McCabe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 186.

⁵⁴⁴ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 121.

⁵⁴⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 121.

⁵⁴⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 122.

⁵⁴⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 122.

⁵⁴⁸ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 122.

Derrida then notes that in “fiction F1—itsself written, let us never forget that—there is thus developed a theory or a procession of writing referred, *in writing*, to an origin older than itself (F7).”⁵⁴⁹ Between F3 and F4 there is a movement in which the reader is led to understand that one is “passing at last into reality.”⁵⁵⁰ In fact, Socrates “applauds when Critias announces to him that he is getting ready to recount what his grandfather told him Solon had told him on the subject of what an Egyptian priest had confided to him about ‘the marvellous exploits accomplished by this city’ (20e), one of these exploits being ‘the greatest of all’ (*panton de hen megiston*).”⁵⁵¹ And since this event is the “greatest of all” it must also have “been *real*.”⁵⁵² But Solon is “presented as a poet of genius” and “if political urgency had left him the leisure to devote himself to his genius, he would have surpassed Hesiod or Homer (21a-b).”⁵⁵³ But this locates Solon (apparently a citizen) as one among the poets, imitators and sophists, which is exactly what disqualifies him to comment on reality. He is amongst those pretenders (or at least *resembles* them) who have no place and so “the mythic saying resembles a discourse without a legitimate father.”⁵⁵⁴ In striving to arrive at the real in the story-telling from F1 to F7, rather than getting closer, “from one telling to the next, the author gets farther and farther away.”⁵⁵⁵

Derrida notes that due to the illegitimacy of *khôra* (it/she has no father) it cannot belong to an oppositional couple. This means that the engendering of *khôra* as receptacle (associated with the nurse/mother) produces an “orphan or bastard” child that is a “third gender/genus.” *Khôra* “does not belong to the ‘race of women’ (*genos gynaikon*).”⁵⁵⁶ This notion of receptacle means that while *khôra* may “give place” she/it is not originary in the way a mother precedes and is the origin of her child (a boy or a girl). There is no such engendering and no such connection between *khôra* and that which she/it receives.

She/it eludes all anthropo-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, and all truth. Preoriginary, *before* and outside of all generation, she no longer even has the meaning of a

⁵⁴⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 122.

⁵⁵⁰ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 123.

⁵⁵¹ Plato, 20e, quoted in Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 123.

⁵⁵² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 123.

⁵⁵³ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 123.

⁵⁵⁴ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 124.

⁵⁵⁵ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 124.

⁵⁵⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 124.

past, of a present that is past. *Before* signifies no temporal anteriority. The relation of independence, the nonrelation, looks more like the relation of the interval of the spacing to what is lodged in it to be received in it.⁵⁵⁷

The discourse on *khôra*—like “the whole rhythm of the *Timaeus*”—is concerned with “backward steps” (*retours en arrière*).⁵⁵⁸ This discourse does not belong to the “assured discourse of philosophy” since it is “preoriginary” and rather requires “an impure philosophical discourse, threatened, bastard, hybrid.”⁵⁵⁹ Since *khôra* gives place to philosophy, philosophy, itself, “cannot speak philosophically of that which looks like its ‘mother,’ its ‘nurse,’ its ‘receptacle,’ or its ‘imprint-bearer.’”⁵⁶⁰ What is more, these figures “are not even true figures.”⁵⁶¹

Khôra is concerned with necessity not truth:

The bold stroke consists here in going back behind and below the origin, or also the birth, toward a *necessity* which is neither generative nor engendered and which carries philosophy, “precedes” (prior to the time that passes or eternal time before history) and “receives” the effect, here the image of oppositions (intelligible and sensible): philosophy. This necessity (*khôra* is its sur-name) seems so virginal that it does not even have the figure of a virgin any longer.⁵⁶²

Khôra “is” something like

[the] “fiduciary ‘link’ that would precede all determinate community, all positive religion, every onto-anthropo-theological horizon. It would link pure singularities prior to any social or political determination, prior to all intersubjectivity, prior even to the opposition between the sacred (or the holy) and the profane.”⁵⁶³

It is relevant to recall that this term “fiduciary link” carries an allusion to the etymology of religion—*ligare* meaning to bind, link or join—that is to be held in trust and is accomplished not by dogma, but by faith. It forms an irreducible connection to religion and in the sense of its irreducibility it remains inviolate, unscathed and uncontaminated. Rei Terada in “Scruples, or, Faith in Derrida” suggests that since *khôra* “remains unassimilable,” it is thereby “linked

⁵⁵⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 124-25.

⁵⁵⁸ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 125.

⁵⁵⁹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 125-26.

⁵⁶⁰ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 126.

⁵⁶¹ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 126.

⁵⁶² Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 126.

⁵⁶³ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 55.

to the sacred.”⁵⁶⁴ Charles P Bigger in *Between Chora and the Good* while preferring a reading of “*chora* that embraces God” rather than “the atheistic version favoured by Derrida and Caputo” acknowledges that “Derrida’s reduction of language to *chora* can help recover a space for sacred scripture, liturgy and prayer.”⁵⁶⁵ While I am not sure that it is quite accurate to call Derrida’s understanding of *khôra* as something to which language is reduced, the idea that *khôra* opens a space for the sacred and associated religious ideas certainly appears to cohere with Caputo’s reading of Derrida.

Furthermore, Derrida supplies “two words” or “two names” for the “two sources” of religion: “messianic” and “*khôra*.”⁵⁶⁶ I have already examined the messianic and its relation to the other, but one might also add that *khôra*, not only epitomises the other in that it is completely unlike any other (sensible or intelligible), it also permits, welcomes and is hospitable to (for want of better terms) all others and without *khôra* the other (every other) would not exist. In order to think *khôra* it is necessary to precede the beginning, before the cosmos, before birth, before philosophy, “just as the origin of the Athenians must be recalled to them from beyond their own memory.”⁵⁶⁷

I now turn to a different creation narrative, Genesis 1:1-2:4a. Interestingly, the structure of this narrative can also be understood as being “centred around” *khôra*, the space that defies logocentrism and allows for the play of *différance*.

⁵⁶⁴ Rei Terada, “Scruples, or, Faith in Derrida.” *Late Derrida: South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 250.

⁵⁶⁵ Charles P Bigger, *Between Chora and the Good: Metaphor’s Metaphysical Neighborhood* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 365-67.

⁵⁶⁶ Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 55-56. That is not to say that the two sources of religion are the messianic and *khôra*, but rather that they are “two words” or “two names” for the sources, “words” that represent possible substitutions. The essay title itself, explicitly suggests that “faith” and “knowledge” are the two sources of religion. To reiterate: “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” Not that this totally answers the question about these “two sources.” Caputo observes: “When Derrida argues in ‘Faith and Knowledge’ that the two sources of religion are faith and the desire to keep safe, he is proposing a recipe for an auto-deconstructive brew because faith is only possible if it is impossible, if it is also unsafe without faith.” John D. Caputo, “The Return of Anti-Religion: From Radical Atheism to Radical Theology,” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 36-37. This suggests an interesting correlation between “knowledge” and “the desire to keep safe.”

⁵⁶⁷ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 126.

3. SDA Uses of the Creation Narrative

The SDA Church, in general, has a particular interest in the creation narrative in Genesis 1 owing to its allegiance to the Sabbath. Since the command to observe the Sabbath every seventh day as outlined in Exodus 20:8-11 (embedded in that part of Scripture commonly known as the Ten Commandments) is aligned with the “days” of creation in Genesis 1 (“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy”⁵⁶⁸), there is a general understanding among SDAs that the “week” in Genesis 1 should be understood as being literal, consecutive 24-hour days. Any other interpretation, according to this prevalent view, is considered to render the Sabbath void and thereby remove one of the primary identifiers of the SDA Church. However, since there are many SDAs who do not hold to the idea that the week in Genesis 1 is necessarily a literal historical week, it is debatable whether or not the Sabbath stands or falls according to this interpretation. There is, as I will continually assert, heterogeneity of thought in the SDA Church, something that has been present from its inception.

There is nevertheless an agenda item at the forthcoming SDA General Conference Session in 2015 to formalise this idea by amending fundamental belief #6 on “Creation” to include the idea that God created in six literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days. This, in itself, would not matter if all SDAs were united on the issue. However, there are those in church employ at SDA educational institutions, particularly in biology departments, where the long ages of evolution do not easily allow for this interpretation of Genesis 1. It is one thing to affirm certain interpretive conclusions in some or other theology class, quite another if one is asserting scientific method as the source of one’s conclusions. There is little doubt that the intended change to fundamental belief #6 is to limit the possibility of other interpretations of Genesis 1. Since this interpretation is also associated with a short chronology of Earth’s history (6000 to 10000 years), it is quite clearly not compatible with the theory of evolution. Even any suggestion of theistic evolution requires a different reading of Genesis 1. This would put the particular employee out of step with SDA beliefs and raise the question as to whether they should be permitted to continue as a Church employee.

I will, therefore, examine Genesis 1 assuming the *a priori* notion of six literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days, to show that despite this precise and narrow limitation,

⁵⁶⁸ Ex. 20:11 (NIV).

there are nevertheless detours and there is still room for the play of *différance*. Before this, it is necessary to examine the SDA idea of “the fundamental belief” and how it tends to operate in the Church. I will show that even the idea of something “fundamental” is not immune to the play of *différance* and that despite the apparent rigid formulation of the fundamental beliefs there is, historically, a resistance to any sort of a binding creed within the SDA Church.

In the central part of this chapter, I will play with the notion of substituting the centre for another. I will remove the central premise of six literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days and replace it with the idea in Genesis 1:2 that the earth was “without form and void.” This is not an arbitrarily selected centre, but is one that has an uncanny resemblance to *khôra*, a resemblance to which Derrida alludes in *Sauf le Nom*. Although not specifically spelled out by Derrida, Caputo claims that the parallel is self-evident: “When he says *khôra*, he is not simply drawing upon the *Timaeus*, which is the manifest reference, but there is also, for anyone with the ears to hear, an allusion being made to the opening verses of Genesis.”⁵⁶⁹

My intent in following other detours of the text in a play of substitutions is in order to read the text carefully, to be faithful to the text, and to recognise the other in the text. Furthermore, by placing something so analogous to *khôra*—“without form and void” (Genesis 1:2)—at the centre, the entire text as a creation narrative is exposed to the play of *différance* which is totally in keeping with a creative spirit.

3.1. A Hermeneutical Framework

It is my intent in this section to show the *différance* operating within the SDA notion of the fundamental belief. Since the very idea of something fundamental resists anything different, I will have recourse to historic Adventism, from 1844 and onwards. The reason for this is partly because I am concerned with origins—with regard to finding the sacred in Derrida (*khôra* and the *Timaeus*, for example) as well as searching for difference in apparently established SDA understandings of the creation narrative in Genesis 1—but also because *différance* includes the element of deferral. By returning to the origins of the SDA Church, I will show that the meaning of “fundamental” or “fundamental belief” in early Adventism was a meaning that was devoid of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism—by which I mean a movement driven by inviolable, exclusive, unbending principles intolerant of

⁵⁶⁹ John D. Caputo, “Before Creation: Derrida’s Memory of God,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 39, no. 3 (September 2006): 92.

anything other—is a (deferred) idea that is striving to make itself present and actually alter the shape of Adventism. This is something that the Church founders never intended. I am, therefore, arguing that *différance* (acknowledging that this is Derrida’s term) was at the centre of early Adventism and that current trends in Adventism (concerned with establishing creeds and norms that dictate SDA beliefs) are a *fundamental* denial of these roots. The move to more clearly identify Adventism by narrowing its beliefs is the destruction of radical Adventism and may lead to the expulsion and resignation of those who differ, even though they are more closely aligned with the spirit of historic Adventism. Nevertheless, this *différance* at the origin of the Church still persists in present day Adventism.

3.1.1. Centring the Discourse

Inasmuch as the structure of this dissertation is central to its meaning, it is relevant to examine the explanatory force and the limitations of this edifice. Of course, any dissertation must have structure, at the very least, to ensure that the logic and coherence of the arguments are perceived as logical and coherent. Nevertheless, within the structure there is considerable room to manoeuvre—what could be called *play*. But this play is not permitted to move arbitrarily and indiscriminately. There is a centre to the structure:

The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of the structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.⁵⁷⁰

Derrida does acknowledge, however, that in the history of Western philosophy there was a “breach” in this understanding of structure or “the structurality of structure.”⁵⁷¹ Derrida distinguishes between what might be termed “classical thought” and what he calls an “event,” or “rupture” in the “history of the concept of structure.”⁵⁷² This “event” is a “decentering” of “the structurality of structure” and refers to “the totality of an era, our own.”⁵⁷³ Its most radical formulation though precedes our day and in this regard, Derrida cites “the

⁵⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 352.

⁵⁷¹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 351-52.

⁵⁷² Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 352.

⁵⁷³ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 354.

Nietzschean critique of metaphysics,” “the Freudian critique of self-presence,” and “the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics.”⁵⁷⁴

In any event, the play, therefore, is limited by the centre: “the center closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible.”⁵⁷⁵ In a sense, the centre could be regarded as sacred since it is that “part” of the structure that cannot be violated. To remove the centre is to destroy the structure:

As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. . . . Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within the structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality.⁵⁷⁶

Hence, Derrida observes that there is a contradiction in the *coherence* of the centred structure. The reason for this is that since the centre is not the same as the totality of the structure and does not belong to the totality of the structure (it is unique) “the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center.”⁵⁷⁷ Although the concept of the *centre* of a structure is totally logical and coherent (how can a structure not have a centre around or upon which it is organised) it “is contradictorily coherent.”⁵⁷⁸

First, it should be noted that these ideas find a definite connection to Derrida’s pivotal thought on *différance* which I will examine in detail in the following section. This is hinted at when Derrida comments laconically: “And as always, coherence as contradiction expresses a force of a desire.”⁵⁷⁹ Translator Allan Bass elaborates:

The reference, in a restricted sense, is to the Freudian theory of neurotic symptoms and dream interpretation In a general sense the reference is to Derrida’s thesis that logic and coherence themselves can only be understood contradictorily, since they presuppose the suppression of *différance*, “writing” in the sense of the general economy.⁵⁸⁰

Second, any idea that a structure is “centred on” a particular concept (and concept is perhaps not the best word here) is also claiming that the *fundamental* integrity of the structure

⁵⁷⁴ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 354.

⁵⁷⁵ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 352.

⁵⁷⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 352.

⁵⁷⁷ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 352.

⁵⁷⁸ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 352.

⁵⁷⁹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 352.

⁵⁸⁰ Alan Bass in Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 443n1.

depends upon this, to use Derrida's terms, "fundamental ground," "fundamental immobility," or "reassuring certitude," all of which are "beyond the reach of play."⁵⁸¹ The "entire history of the concept of structure" (prior to the event or rupture already mentioned above), on the basis of the centre which cannot be repeated, substituted or replaced, has actually "through a series of substitutions" given the centre different forms or names.⁵⁸² "The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix . . . is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word."⁵⁸³ In fact Derrida claims that "all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidōs*, *archē*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth."⁵⁸⁴

Derrida now examines within the human sciences (the chapter heading is "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"), ethnology, since ethnology, strictly speaking, only became noted as a science when European culture was *decentred*, "driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference."⁵⁸⁵ This leads to Derrida scrutinising the opposition between nature and culture via the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Traditionally, one can say that "that which is *universal* and spontaneous, and not dependent on any particular culture or any determinative norm, belongs to nature."⁵⁸⁶ Also traditionally, "that which depends upon a system of *norms* regulating society and therefore is capable of *varying* from one social structure to another, belongs to culture."⁵⁸⁷

Lévi-Strauss, however, encounters a *scandal*—the *incest prohibition*⁵⁸⁸—which cannot abide the nature/culture opposition: "The incest prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this

⁵⁸¹ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 352.

⁵⁸² Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 353.

⁵⁸³ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 353.

⁵⁸⁴ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 353.

⁵⁸⁵ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 356.

⁵⁸⁶ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 357.

⁵⁸⁷ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 357.

⁵⁸⁸ I do not think that Derrida has a particular interest in "the incest prohibition" per se, or even in universal moral principles, rather he uses the notion of the incest prohibition to deconstruct the nature/culture opposition. Derrida follows Lévi-Strauss's logic in order to destabilise categories that are often considered inviolable, the nature/culture opposition serves as an example.

sense one could call it cultural.”⁵⁸⁹ But the scandal only exists as a consequence of “a system of concepts,” namely, the nature/culture opposition.⁵⁹⁰ Once incest prohibition is no longer conceived as being part of the difference between nature and culture, it ceases to upset the opposition. “[I]t is something which escapes these concepts and certainly precedes them—probably as the condition of their possibility.”⁵⁹¹

Derrida concludes that the nature/culture opposition, though “too cursorily examined . . . already shows that language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.”⁵⁹² Lévi-Strauss moves towards resolving this by “conserving these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools that can still be used.”⁵⁹³ Lévi-Strauss has a twofold intention. On the one hand, oppositions such as nature/culture have methodological worth; while on the other hand, one should remain critical of their truth value. This methodology is described in terms of *bricolage*.⁵⁹⁴

Bricolage is “the necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined.”⁵⁹⁵ The *bricoleur* is some-one who uses the instruments present in language and since they are flawed, can change and adapt them, acknowledging their heterogeneous nature. “There is therefore a critique of language in the form of *bricolage*.”⁵⁹⁶ Opposed to the *bricoleur* is the engineer who “would be the absolute origin of [his/her] own discourse” and “should be the one to construct the totality of [his/her] language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth.”⁵⁹⁷ Hence *bricolage*, while “an intellectual activity is also a mythopoetical activity.” With regard to Lévi-Strauss’s “mythological,” Derrida notes: “It is here that we rediscover the mythopoetical virtue of *bricolage*. In effect, what appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of

⁵⁸⁹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 357.

⁵⁹⁰ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 358.

⁵⁹¹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 358.

⁵⁹² That is, the structure/system contains the conditions for its own subversion.

⁵⁹³ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 359.

⁵⁹⁴ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 359-60.

⁵⁹⁵ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 360.

⁵⁹⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 360.

⁵⁹⁷ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 360.

discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or an absolute *archia*.⁵⁹⁸

Hence, with regard to myth, there is no such thing as a “key myth” that can be regarded as the point of reference or template for other myths. Also, there “is no unity or absolute source of the myth.”⁵⁹⁹ The source of myth cannot be pinned down and defined in terms of existence or presence, hence:

The discourse on the acentric structure that myth itself is, cannot itself have an absolute subject or an absolute center. It must avoid the violence that consists in centering a language which describes an acentric structure if it is not to shortchange the form and the movement of myth. Therefore it is necessary to forego scientific or philosophical discourse, to renounce the *episteme* which it absolutely requires, which is the absolute requirement that we go back to the source, to the center, to the founding basis, to the principle, and so on.⁶⁰⁰

The form of myth should not follow that of *epistemic* discourse, but rather should “have the form of that of which it speaks.”⁶⁰¹ Lévi-Strauss even claims to pattern his own work on myths: “And in seeking to imitate the spontaneous movement of mythological thought, this essay . . . has had to conform to the requirements of that thought and to respect its rhythm. It follows that this book on myth is itself a kind of myth.”⁶⁰²

Having followed and outlined Lévi-Strauss’s argument (without apparently agreeing or disagreeing), Derrida now asks: “If the mythological is mythomorphic, are all discourses on myth equivalent? Shall we have to abandon any epistemological requirement which permits us to distinguish between several qualities of discourse on myth?”⁶⁰³ These questions, Derrida suggests, are not only unanswerable, but are also questions that Lévi-Strauss does not answer. The difficulty is the relation of the philosopheme on the one hand and the mytheme on the other. Empiricism, so closely aligned with much of science (and Derrida is here referring to the social sciences, for example, language), cannot arrive at the final statement of meaning on myth because of “the limit of totalisation.”⁶⁰⁴ There is always more data, another

⁵⁹⁸ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 361.

⁵⁹⁹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 362.

⁶⁰⁰ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 362.

⁶⁰¹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 362.

⁶⁰² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Wightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 5-6, quoted in Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 363.

⁶⁰³ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 364.

⁶⁰⁴ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 365.

word, another myth.⁶⁰⁵ Structuralism, Derrida notes, “justifiably claims to be the critique of empiricism” and yet “structural schemata are always proposed as hypotheses resulting from a finite quantity of information and which are subjected to the proof of experience.”⁶⁰⁶

Unsurprisingly, then, and supporting Derrida’s observation, Lévi-Strauss when commenting on the acquisition of language (“a question of language on language”) says:⁶⁰⁷

Experience proves that a linguist can work out the grammar of a given language from a remarkably small number of sentences. . . . And even a partial grammar or an outline grammar is a precious acquisition when we are dealing with unknown languages. Syntax does not become evident only after a (theoretically limitless) series of events has been recorded and examined, because it is itself the body of rules governing their production.⁶⁰⁸

However, Lévi-Strauss continues: “Should fresh data come to hand, they will be used to check or modify the formulation of certain grammatical laws, so that some are abandoned and replaced by new ones.”⁶⁰⁹ Since total knowledge is impossible “one then refers to the empirical endeavour of either a subject or a finite richness which it can never master.”⁶¹⁰

Derrida, moving in a different direction, suggests that this “nontotalization” can be viewed “from the standpoint of the concept of *play*.”⁶¹¹ The dilemma of totalisation is now problematic “not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and finite language—excludes totalisation.”⁶¹² *There is no centre*:

This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of using an inexhaustible field, as in the classical

⁶⁰⁵ The difficulty is that one is tempted to resolve this with recourse to some or other *logos* (i.e. not words but “Word”), a totalising rationale that can account for all the data that one has, and all the data that one may yet have. It is this very logocentrism that concerns Derrida. For Derrida, this does not necessarily mean that one is paralysed and unable to act (since one is lacking all of the information one might wish to have). Elsewhere although not in this essay, Derrida does have recourse to faith which itself displaces certainty (or absolute truth claims) and is nevertheless a call to act in the face of this uncertainty: “Our faith is not assured because a faith never can be, it must never be a certainty,” but “absolute responsibility” and “absolute passion.” Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 80 and Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 59.

⁶⁰⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 364.

⁶⁰⁷ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 364.

⁶⁰⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *Raw and Cooked*, 7-8, quoted in Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 364-65.

⁶⁰⁹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 365.

⁶¹⁰ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 365.

⁶¹¹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 365.

⁶¹² Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 365.

hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. . . . One could say . . . that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*.⁶¹³

Following Lévi-Strauss, Derrida's moves towards resolution: "One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*."⁶¹⁴ Empiricism falls short in that there is always more data that could have been considered. The supplement also refers to the fact of a "something more" but is distinguished from that of empiricism. The supplement is a "movement of signification" that "adds something"⁶¹⁵ but "this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified"⁶¹⁶ or, to state this in other words: "The *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be *supplemented*."⁶¹⁷

Play itself is in tension with history. In the work of Lévi-Strauss, "the respect for the internal originality of the structure, compels a neutralisation of time and history."⁶¹⁸ The birth of a new structure, for example, always requires a "rupture with its past, its origin and its cause" as "the very condition of its structural specificity."⁶¹⁹ When considering the transition from one structure to another, there is no acknowledged process or recognition of past conditions that led to the new structure. This is accomplished by "putting history between brackets. In this 'structuralist' moment, the concepts of chance and discontinuity are

⁶¹³ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 365.

⁶¹⁴ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 365.

⁶¹⁵ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 365.

⁶¹⁶ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 365-66.

⁶¹⁷ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 367. Here is a brief, almost passing reference to the supplement, a concept which is certainly not insignificant in Derrida's work, although there is something contradictory about such a claim as Nicholas Royle notes with regard to the supplement: "No key idea in Derrida, then, or nothing but key ideas: that was one our starting points. This paradox might be most neatly illustrated in the notion of the supplement. It is apparent in everything he writes" Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2003), 47. Allan Bass observes its significance in *Of Grammatology*: "This double sense of supplement—to supply something which is missing, or to supply something additional—is at the center of Derrida's deconstruction of traditional linguistics in *De la grammatologie*." Alan Bass in Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 443n12.

⁶¹⁸ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 368.

⁶¹⁹ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 368.

indispensable.”⁶²⁰ Derrida notes Lévi-Strauss’s dependence on these concepts “as concerns that structure of structures, language.”⁶²¹

Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstance of its appearance on the scale of animal life, language could only have been born in one fell swoop. Things could not have set about acquiring signification progressively . . . a transition came about from a stage where nothing had a meaning to another where everything possessed it.⁶²²

Play is also in tension with presence in that it “is the disruption of presence.”⁶²³

The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always the play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around.⁶²⁴

Despite the fact that Lévi-Strauss foregrounds this notion of “play of repetition and repetition of play,” Derrida notes that one nevertheless perceives in his work “an ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech” On the one hand, Lévi-Strauss presents a thinking of play that is “turned toward the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin . . . the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, [and] guilty.” On the other hand, Derrida notes “the Nietzschean *affirmation*.” This “is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of the world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.”⁶²⁵

“There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play.”⁶²⁶ The first seeks for (or “dreams of”) “full presence, the reassuring foundation and the end of play” and, the second, an affirmation that “plays without security” giving itself to “absolute chance . . . to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.”⁶²⁷ For Derrida, it is not a question of

⁶²⁰ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 368.

⁶²¹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 368.

⁶²² Claude Lévi Strauss, “Introduction à l’oeuvre de Marcel Mauss,” *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1950), xlv, quoted in Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 368.

⁶²³ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 369.

⁶²⁴ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 369.

⁶²⁵ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 369.

⁶²⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 369.

⁶²⁷ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 269-70.

choosing between the two, though they are irreconcilable, but rather “to try to conceive of the common ground” as well as the *différance* of their “irreducible difference.”⁶²⁸

With reference to this dissertation and its relation to *bricolage* and myth, there is an apparent dissociation. I have selected numerous centres around which I have endeavoured to structure a hermeneutical method. But *bricolage* “is a mythopoetical activity” which has a “stated abandonment of all reference to a center.”⁶²⁹ Hence, even though my selected centres—negative theology, the other, detours, *khôra* and *différance*—have the intent of decentring, they still serve to provide a stable reference that cannot exhaust or give the final word on a text. Each of these centres is part of the *play* that is *substituted* in the field that has no centre. Because there is no centre and they are artificially placed as the centre, they represent a “movement of *supplementarity*.” To reiterate:

This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of using an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. . . . One could say . . . that this movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*.⁶³⁰

Nevertheless, the substitutions that are placed at the centre are to a certain extent *arbitrary* or, to use the word Derrida uses, *play*. They do provide structure and meaning. They lead to an-*other* meaning, an-*other* understanding, an-*other* inclusion, but there is still more to be said. But could this open-ended substitution that implies that there is “more” not potentially be the “more” of tyranny, oppression and persecution? The answer to this is only in the affirmative if all centres are equal, which they are not. A centre can obviously be a pretext for tyranny and exclusion. The example I have selected for examination in this dissertation is the SDA interpretation of the days of Genesis 1 as literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days. If this centre is allowed to stand, it will indeed negatively impact on the lives of many SDAs, particularly those in church employ (and, hence, lends itself to a form of tyranny). It is for this reason that I have repeatedly argued that the centre must de-centre and turn away from its own rightness, its own certainty. Hence, the centres I have selected are not absolutely arbitrary. All centres are not equivalent and there are many substitutions that function not as the final truth of the matter, but as a means to protect from

⁶²⁸ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 370.

⁶²⁹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 361.

⁶³⁰ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 365.

tyranny. The “more” in this sense, is a reference to the other that has been excluded and strives to *include*. Rather than permitting tyranny, the “more” works to prevent it.

Hence, my dissertation would not collapse into incoherence if I were to substitute the section entitled “Detours” with another entitled “Supplementarity” or if I were to substitute the section entitled “*Différance*” with another entitled “Deconstruction.” The dissertation could have been *different*, but then could not all dissertations ever written have been different? Is this not part of the creativity and play that is a work in any discourse? The fact that the centre is considered to be the focal point that cannot be played with is what the play of substitution challenges. There is a structure and there is a centre, but this centre is not really the centre. It is not really part of the structure, even though it has to be there, otherwise there would be no structure, no coherence. The centre is a detour that itself is subject to *différance*. The centre is not sacred. There is no centre. In other words, *différance* is the antithesis of logocentrism. It is for this reason that I have selected *différance* as a focal point. By its very nature it displaces the centre and suggests something other. Also, *différance* is related to *khôra*. If *khôra* is the space that allows for an infinite play of substitutions, then *différance* is the play.

3.1.2. *Différance*

Caputo, borrowing from Derrida’s phrase “*khôra* is its sur-name,” suggests the “other name:”⁶³¹

If *différance* is what deconstruction is all about, in a nutshell, then ‘*khôra* is its surname.’ To deploy a famous Platonic image: the story of *khôra* works like an ‘allegory’ of *différance*, each addressing a common, kindred non-essence, impropriety, and namelessness. . . .

⁶³¹ I use the term “other name” tentatively. This is because of the challenge of translating into English the French *sur-nom*: “*Sur-nom* means a name, title, or epithet added to a person’s name, as in a ‘nickname’ such as Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson or William ‘the Conqueror’ . . . In English the word ‘surname’ still means (and this has even become its primary meaning) the ‘family name’ that follows one’s first, given, or baptismal name, i.e. that follows one’s ‘pre-name’ or *prénom* as it is called in French. Unlike the English language, the French language, in its modern usage, has not retained this meaning of *sur-nom*.” Thomas Dutoit, “Translating the Name?” in *On the Name*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), ix-x. The hyphen in “sur-name” could indicate that it is an added name (“supplemental name”) that supplies added meaning that one’s “family” (inherited) name lacks, but is given by the “nickname.” In this sense, *khôra* would be a “nickname” for *différance*. It is also necessary to recall, however, that both *différance* and *khôra* are prior to language and therefore defy naming. Hence, “Sur-Name names the unnameable, that is, at the same time what one neither *can* nor *should* name, define or know, because to begin with, what one sur-names, then slips *beyond being*, without staying there.” Dutoit, “Translating the Name?” xv.

Différance, like *khôra* is a great receptacle upon which every constituted trace or mark is imprinted, 'older,' prior, preoriginary.⁶³²

Différance, then, can be seen as the logical partner to *khôra*, not because they are synonymous, but because they allow for one another. They suggest one another. *Khôra*, as I have already tried to make clear, allows for *everything*. But *différance* is not to be thought of as a thing. Like *khôra* it is "'older,' prior, preoriginary."

Derrida begins his comments on *différance* by referencing the letter *a* as the letter within the word that distinguishes it from the word *difference*.⁶³³ Perhaps it is fortuitous that this is the first letter, the *beginning* of the alphabet, in that so much of what is said and what I will say further refers to origins and beginnings (Genesis 1, for example). But not only this, *différance* itself, though not, strictly speaking, a beginning or the origin of language, has something that could be called pre-originary. It signifies or marks or, to quote Derrida, is *insinuated* "here and there into a writing of the word *difference*" and is done so "in the course of a writing on writing, and also a writing within writing" And one could bypass the "mute irony" of this spelling mistake and "act as if it made no difference."⁶³⁴ Of course, when something is deliberately misspelled, it can scarcely be named a mistake and so Derrida refers to his discourse on *différance* not as "an apology" for "this silent lapse in spelling" but rather "a kind of insistent intensification of its play."⁶³⁵ This play is immediately evidenced with Derrida's use of words such as "mute," "silent" and "inaudible," all of which emphasise the failure of speech to express this difference in *différance*:

Now it happens, I would say in effect, that this graphic difference (*a* instead of *e*), this marked difference between two apparently vocal notations, between two vowels, remains purely graphic: it is read, or it is written, but it cannot be heard.⁶³⁶ It cannot be apprehended in speech and we will see why it also bypasses the order of apprehension in general.⁶³⁷

⁶³² Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 96-97.

⁶³³ Derrida, "*Différance*," 3.

⁶³⁴ Derrida, "*Différance*," 3.

⁶³⁵ Derrida, "*Différance*," 3.

⁶³⁶ Since the English word "difference" is (possibly) pronounced differently to Derrida's *différance*, it could, of course, be argued that the difference *can* be heard and the difference (in English) is not only graphic but also audible. For this reason, and to understand the force of Derrida's argument, it is helpful to assume that when it is written in the English text, *différance* is pronounced in exactly the same manner as the English word "difference." There is a limitation to this, but it is nevertheless helpful.

⁶³⁷ Derrida, "*Différance*," 3-4.

Derrida suggests that the letter *a* is a “tacit monument” or a pyramid—similar in shape in its capital form—borrowing from “Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* in which the body of the sign is compared to the Egyptian pyramid.”⁶³⁸ Translator Allan Bass explicates Derrida’s meaning as “referring elliptically and playfully to the following ideas:”⁶³⁹

Derrida first plays on the “silence” of the *a* in *différance* as being like a silent tomb, like a pyramid, like the pyramid to which Hegel compares the body of the sign. “Tomb” in Greek is *oikesis*, which is akin to the Greek *oikos*—house—from which the word “economy” derives (*oikos*—house—and *nemein*—to manage). Thus Derrida speaks of the “economy of death” as the “familial residence of the tomb of the proper.” Further, and more elliptically still, Derrida speaks of the tomb, which always bears an inscription in stone, announcing the death of the Tyrant.⁶⁴⁰

There is reference here to at least three ideas that converge in Derrida’s description of *différance*. The first is “the delineation of a site” (a tomb); the second is the related notion of “the economy of death” and the third is the “stone” that announces “the death of the tyrant.”⁶⁴¹ Derrida for the moment is concerned to emphasise that he is reading a *written text* trying to convey a distinction to his audience which is only evident on the page and cannot be heard.⁶⁴² Thus “there is no phonetic writing” or, at least, “no purely phonetic writing,” since “the difference which establishes phonemes and lets them be heard remains in and of itself inaudible, in every sense of the word.”⁶⁴³ *Différance* serves as the exemplar of this very idea (I note again that, in English, it is helpful to presume that *différance* is pronounced in the same manner as the English word “difference”).

Différance belongs neither to the sensible (since the “difference marked in the ‘differ()nce’ between the *e* and the *a* eludes both vision and hearing”) nor the intelligible (since it is not “affiliated with the objectivity of *theorein* or understanding”).⁶⁴⁴ *Différance*

⁶³⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 4.

⁶³⁹ Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 4n2.

⁶⁴⁰ Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 4n2.

⁶⁴¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 4.

⁶⁴² I do not think that Derrida is here trying to prioritise writing over speech; rather he is questioning, via this inversion, the (often assumed) priority of speech over writing.

⁶⁴³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 5.

⁶⁴⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 5. Translator Allan Bass notes that Derrida is pointing out that sensibility and intelligibility depend on one another. This is accomplished by the words Derrida uses to describe objective intelligibility: “*Theorein*—the Greek origin of ‘theory’—literally means ‘to look at,’ ‘to see,’ and the word Derrida uses for ‘understanding’ here is *entendement*, the noun form of *entendre*, to *hear*.” Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 5n3. Hence, the intelligible leans on the sensible to discover its meaning.

therefore “resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible.”⁶⁴⁵ In this sense, *différance* shows itself to be not unlike *khôra* in that “what Plato in the *Timaeus* designates by the name *khôra* . . . is neither ‘sensible’ nor ‘intelligible’” but “belongs to a third genus (*triton genos*).”⁶⁴⁶ Similarly, Caputo observes that *différance* “never gets as far as being or entity or presence, which is why it is emblemized by insubstantial quasi-beings like ashes and ghosts which flutter between existence and nonexistence, or with humble *khôra*, say, rather than the prestigious Platonic sun.”⁶⁴⁷ Of course, at the time of the address “*Différance*” (1968), Derrida’s principal essay on *khôra* was yet to come (1993).

The *a* of *différance* “cannot be *exposed*,” because in order to do so it would need to “become *present*.”⁶⁴⁸ Hence, statements that begin “*différance* is” should be written with the “is” crossed out (under erasure).⁶⁴⁹ It is in relation to this need to avoid offering *différance* “to the present” that Derrida observes that “the detours, locutions and syntax in which I have to take recourse will resemble those of negative theology, occasionally even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology.”⁶⁵⁰ Nevertheless this writing that “delineates that *différance* is *not*” differs from the purpose of negative theologies which “recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being.”⁶⁵¹

Différance is “irreducible to any ontological or theological—ontotheological—reappropriation” nor can one discover “an absolute point of departure.”⁶⁵² There is “nowhere

⁶⁴⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 5.

⁶⁴⁶ Derrida, “*Khôra*,” 89.

⁶⁴⁷ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 2.

⁶⁴⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 5.

⁶⁴⁹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 6.

⁶⁵⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 6.

⁶⁵¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 6.

⁶⁵² Derrida, “*Différance*,” 6.

to *begin* to trace the sheaf⁶⁵³ or the graphics of *différance*.”⁶⁵⁴

In the delineation of *différance* everything is strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside of the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is not a simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a *telos* or theme of domination, a mastery and ultimate reappropriation of the development of a field.⁶⁵⁵

This strategy is one “without finality” using “blind tactics” and “there is a certain wandering” employing “the concept of *play*.”⁶⁵⁶ The “tracing of *différance*” is therefore unlike “the lines of philosophical-logical discourse” as well as “its symmetrical and integral inverse, empirical-logical discourse.”⁶⁵⁷

To “take us to within sight of what is at stake,” Derrida engages in “a simple and approximate semantic analysis.” The Latin verb *differre* (French: *différer*) has two meanings: to differ and to defer.⁶⁵⁸ Derrida then suggests that *differre* (Latin) is not “a simple translation of the Greek *diapherein*” which now links Derrida’s discourse on *différance* to “the less originally philosophical [Latin] than the other [Greek].” The reason for this, according to Derrida, is that the Greek *diapherein* “does not comport one of the two motifs of the Latin *differre*, to wit, the action of putting off until later . . .” The Latin *differre* contains the nuances of not only to differ (*diapherein*) but also to defer. The idea of “to defer” is encapsulated in the word *temporization*: “*Différer* in this sense is to temporize, to take recourse, consciously or unconsciously, in the temporal and temporizing mediation of a

⁶⁵³ Derrida uses the word “sheaf” since “*différance* is literally neither a word nor a concept” and through this word Derrida wishes to designate *différance* in terms of what he calls “the economy” of “this graphic disorder” not by describing “a history and narrating its stages, text by text, context by context” but rather by “the *general system of this economy*.” Also, “the word *sheaf* seems to mark more appropriately that the assemblage to be proposed has the complex structure of a weaving, and interlacing, which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning—or of force—to go off again in different directions, just as it is always ready to tie itself up with others.” Derrida, “*Différance*,” 3.

⁶⁵⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 6.

⁶⁵⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 7.

⁶⁵⁶ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 7.

⁶⁵⁷ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 7.

⁶⁵⁸ Of interest is that the meaning of defer, in English, is to postpone or put off to a future date, which is the meaning that Derrida invokes from the French. However, defer, in English, also has the meaning of submitting or entrusting to another. When one considers Derrida’s concern for the other, this meaning suggests an enticing detour.

detour that suspend the accomplishment of fulfilment of ‘desire’ or ‘will,’ and equally effects this suspension in a mode that annuls or tempers its own effect.”⁶⁵⁹

“The other sense of *différer* is the more common and identifiable one,”⁶⁶⁰ namely, to differ. In French, however, there are two words—*différents* and *différends*—pronounced the same as one another, meaning what is usually understood by the English word “difference.” However, “*les différents* are different things; *les différends* are differences of opinion, grounds for dispute [a polemical meaning].”⁶⁶¹ Hence:

Now the word *différence* (with an *e*) can never refer either to *différer* as temporization or to *différends* as *polemos*. Thus the word *différance* (with an *a*) is to compensate—economically—this loss of meaning, for *différance* can refer simultaneously to the entire configuration of its meanings. . . . In its polysemia this word, of course, must defer⁶⁶² to the discourse in which it occurs, its interpretive context; but in a way it defers itself . . . the *a* immediately deriving from the present participle (*différant*), thereby bringing us close to the very action of the verb *différer*, before it has even produced an effect constituted as something different or as *différence* (with an *e*).⁶⁶³

There is also something “undecidable” in *différance* with regard to its verbal structure. Although it “brings us close to the infinitive and active kernel of *différer*, *différance* (with an *a*) neutralizes what the infinitive denotes as simply active.”⁶⁶⁴ Obviously referring to French grammatical forms, Derrida observes that “in the usage in our language the ending *-ance* remains undecided *between* the active and the passive.”⁶⁶⁵

When something is not present then “the sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present.” It is the “detour” that signifies and “the sign, in this sense, is deferred presence.” The sign is “secondary” since it is derived from the thing itself and

⁶⁵⁹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 8.

⁶⁶⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 8.

⁶⁶¹ Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 8n8.

⁶⁶² Allan Bass translates using the English word “defer” in the sense of submitting to (the opinion of) another. In fact, he uses the word “defer” twice: “In its polysemia this word, of course, must *defer* to the discourse in which it occurs, its interpretive context; but in a way it *defers* itself [emphasis added].” An examination of the French phrase indicates no words with an obvious etymological connection to Derrida’s *différance*: “Il y renvoie non seulement, bien entendu et comme toute signification, à être soutenu par un discours ou un contexte interprétatif mais déjà en quelque sorte par lui-même.” Jacques Derrida, *Marges de philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 8. Although this use of defer is quite intriguing, it remains an aberration of the English text, a choice made by the translator—whether consciously or unconsciously.

⁶⁶³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 8.

⁶⁶⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 9.

⁶⁶⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 9.

“provisional” since it is a movement towards this missing presence, “it is a movement of mediation.”⁶⁶⁶

In order to unpack this semiology, Derrida references Saussure who “first of all is the thinker who put the *arbitrary character of the sign* and the *differential character* of the sign at the foundation of general semiology, particularly linguistics.”⁶⁶⁷ These two, arbitrary and differential, according to Saussure, “are two correlative characteristics.”⁶⁶⁸

Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms* . . . language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.⁶⁶⁹

The point for Derrida is to differentiate *différance* from the “signified concepts” that refer to other concepts “by means of the systematic play of differences.”⁶⁷⁰ This “play” of differences that Saussure speaks of, *différance* (says Derrida), “is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general.”⁶⁷¹ Saussure suggests that these differences occur within the system of language and are effects of language itself: “these differences *play*: in language, in speech too, and in the exchange between language and speech.”⁶⁷² But *différance* “produces . . . these differences, these effects of difference.”⁶⁷³ *Différance* is not a presence, a substance or thing, or even, as Derrida repeatedly states “a concept or a word” and, therefore, neither is it an origin that precedes these differences. “*Différance* is the non-full, non-simple, structure and

⁶⁶⁶ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 9.

⁶⁶⁷ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 10.

⁶⁶⁸ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 117, quoted in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 10.

⁶⁶⁹ Saussure, 117-20, quoted in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 10-11. I am not convinced that Derrida would totally concur with Saussure’s conclusion that “the idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of *less importance* [emphasis added] than the other signs that surround it.” Derrida follows Saussure because he is interested in correcting the notion that speech is essentially prior to writing. Of course, if the converse were generally accepted as being the case, Derrida would push in the other direction. *Différance* is presented as being prior to (or the condition and possibility for) language—both speech and writing.

⁶⁷⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 11.

⁶⁷¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 11.

⁶⁷² Derrida, “*Différance*,” 11.

⁶⁷³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 11.

differentiating origin of differences. Thus the name ‘origin’ no longer suits it.”⁶⁷⁴ *Différance* makes space for differences, but it is no more the origin of these differences than *khôra* is the origin of all that is inscribed on her. The problem is that if this play of differences is not “caused” by *différance* then one “would have to speak of an effect without a cause which very quickly would lead to speaking of no effect at all.”⁶⁷⁵

The dilemma is that *différance* seems to be an unfortunate *effect* of language, in that languages are not constituted with the intent of deferring and differing from what they mean to say although they end up doing this. However, *intent* is not the issue but rather that languages—outside of any meaning of the text (the words or concepts used) and beyond the context that may inform a particular narrative—differ with themselves.⁶⁷⁶ There is what Derrida calls “archi-writing, archi-trace or *différance*” or “spacing” or “supplement.”⁶⁷⁷ Any signification refers to what is not present, to something, in other words, that is not itself. But there is nevertheless the “mark of the past element” (that is no longer present) as well as a relation to “the future element” (which the iterable nature of words necessitate).⁶⁷⁸ But “this trace” is “related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not; what absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present.” There is “an interval”⁶⁷⁹ that must separate the signification from the present “in order for the present to be itself.”⁶⁸⁰ Derrida’s use of “archi” as in archi-writing and archi-trace is helpful. “Archi” refers to

⁶⁷⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 11.

⁶⁷⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 12.

⁶⁷⁶ It is this idea of languages differing that complicates the idea of a “literal” reading of a text, particularly in the way the term is (possibly) intended in the SDA hermeneutic applied to Genesis 1: six *literal*, historical, consecutive 24-hour days. But even this phrase betrays its fear of multiplicity. If a literal reading of a text holds to the *single* primary meaning of a word (whatever that might be) and this can always be identified, then why does this word “day” require so many descriptors (literal, historical, consecutive and 24 hours in length). Is a *literal* day also a 24-hour day? What is the difference between a literal day and a literal 24-hour day? The precise description is an attempt to exclude all other interpretations, and the designation “literal,” on its own, is not sufficient to accomplish this.

⁶⁷⁷ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 13.

⁶⁷⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 13.

⁶⁷⁹ I do not think that this “interval” is to be understood as an interval in the sense of a passage of time. *Différance* is a-historical and it is fair to say that the play of possibilities always remains (whether past, present or future). Derrida’s reference to this term “archi” is an attempt to describe “with language” that which he feels does not properly belong to language.

⁶⁸⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 13.

something *earlier*, something *before* that *rules* or *informs* how that which comes later operates. *Différance* precedes language and institutes the trace from which language cannot escape since it is built into the very matrix of language and governs how it operates, even though an agent may intend to say or write something different. It is this “archi-writing, archi-trace, or *différance*”⁶⁸¹ that institutes this spacing that differs with the present.

Derrida reiterates that *differentiation* is not sufficient to describe *différance* since the notion of deferral is largely absent. Thus, half-way through his essay, Derrida arrives at the key questions that one may have thought would have occurred in the opening paragraphs:

Differences, thus, are “produced”—deferred—by *différance*. But *what* defers or *who* defers? In other words, *what is différence*? With this question we reach another level and another resource of our problematic.

What differs? Who differs? What is *différance*?⁶⁸²

The reason that the questions could not hitherto be addressed is because of the need to disengage any description of *différance* from the syntax that structure the questions—“what is?” “who is?” “who is it that?” These refer to a “present being” which itself “eventually would come to defer or to differ.”⁶⁸³

Derrida challenges the prioritising of speech noted by Saussure: “Language is necessary in order for speech to be intelligible and to produce all of its effects; but the latter is necessary in order for language to be established; historically, the fact of speech always comes first.”⁶⁸⁴ But, Derrida argues, if “the opposition of speech to language is rigorous, then, *différance* would be not only the play of differences within language but also the relation of speech to language, the detour through which I must pass in order to speak”⁶⁸⁵ The problem is that a subject can only become “a *speaking* subject” or “a *signifying* subject . . . by inscribing itself in the system of differences” and “the speaking or signifying subject could not be present to itself, as speaking or signifying, without the play of linguistic or semiological *différance*.”⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 13.

⁶⁸² Derrida, “*Différance*,” 14.

⁶⁸³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 14-15.

⁶⁸⁴ Saussure, 18, 37, quoted in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 12, 15.

⁶⁸⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 15.

⁶⁸⁶ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 16.

This raises the question as to whether or not an “intuitive consciousness” is possible prior to speech or signs. But consciousness is only manifested as “self-presence.” Derrida, therefore, notes that the “privilege granted to consciousness . . . signifies the privilege granted to the present” and “this privilege is the ether of metaphysics,⁶⁸⁷ the element of our thought that is caught in the language of metaphysics.”⁶⁸⁸

Derrida “solicits”⁶⁸⁹ the “value of presence” via Heidegger who has demonstrated it to be “the ontotheological determination of Being.”⁶⁹⁰ This implies that presence and consciousness are not *directly* connected to one another and Derrida, rather, uses the phrase “consciousness as meaning in self presence.”⁶⁹¹ The word “meaning” is from the French *vouloir-dire* “which has a strong sense of willing (*voluntas*) to say, putting this attempt to mean in conjunction with speech.”⁶⁹² This “gesture of Heidegger” causes Derrida “to posit presence—and specifically consciousness, the being beside itself of consciousness—no longer as the absolutely central form of Being but as a ‘determination’ and as an ‘effect’.”⁶⁹³

Derrida refers to both Nietzsche and Freud who both “put consciousness into question in its assured certainty of itself . . . on the basis of the motif of *différance*.”⁶⁹⁴ Derrida notes that, for Nietzsche, “the great principal activity is unconscious” and “consciousness is the

⁶⁸⁷ The term “metaphysics,” often made congruent with “metaphysics of presence,” is sometimes viewed as Derrida’s enemy, as though the eradication of all metaphysical claims would resolve the failings of Western philosophy. In defending Derrida’s apparent “attack” on metaphysics, Christopher Norris points out that much of Derrida’s own writing is a form of metaphysical thinking: “Here I shall take ‘metaphysics’—conventionally enough—to denote the particular branch of philosophy that raises certain distinctive issues concerning the *conditions of possibility* for thought, knowledge, and experience in general. That is to say, metaphysics has always involved some version of the claim (most explicitly advanced by Kant) to deduce those conditions from a rigorous enquiry into *a priori* structures and modalities of human understanding. No doubt it is the case that Derrida has come up with some complicating arguments which may be seen to challenge received ideas of what counts as an instance of *a priori* truth, of a form of transcendental deduction from first principles that would serve to secure or to validate any such claims. Nevertheless his thinking belongs very much to the same tradition of enquiry, whatever the problems that come to light when he examines the various forms it has taken down through the history of Western post-Hellenic thought.” Norris, 16.

⁶⁸⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 16.

⁶⁸⁹ The French “*solliciter*” like the English *solicit* derives from an Old Latin expression meaning to shake the whole, to make something tremble in its entirety.” Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 16n18.

⁶⁹⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 16.

⁶⁹¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 16.

⁶⁹² Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 16n19.

⁶⁹³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 16.

⁶⁹⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 17.

effect of forces whose essence, byways, and modalities are not proper to it.”⁶⁹⁵ But “force itself is never present” and “there would be no force in general without the difference between forces.”⁶⁹⁶ These forces may be opposed but are never equal “even if they are granted an opposition of meaning.”⁶⁹⁷ Nietzsche’s thought incorporates “a critique of philosophy as an active indifference to difference.”⁶⁹⁸

Thus one could reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same.⁶⁹⁹

“Thus, *différance* is the name we might give to the ‘active,’ moving discord of different forces, and of differences of forces, that Nietzsche sets up against the entire system of metaphysical grammar, whenever this system governs culture, philosophy, and science.”⁷⁰⁰

This “energetics or economics of force” (diaphoristics) which “questions the primacy of presence as consciousness, is also the major motif of Freud’s thought.”⁷⁰¹ Derrida notes that the notions of differ and defer are “tied together in Freud’s thought.”⁷⁰² First, with reference to Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1885), “in which Freud attempted to cast his psychological thinking in a neurological framework,”⁷⁰³ Derrida suggests:

The concepts of trace (*Spur*), of breaching (*Bahnung*) [breaching is the preferred translation since both the German *Bahnung* and the French *rayage* carry the notion of “breaking open” not contained in the alternative English translation “facilitation”]⁷⁰⁴ . . . are inseparable from *différance*. The origin of memory, and of the psyche as (conscious or unconscious) memory in general, can be described only by taking into account the difference between breaches. Freud

⁶⁹⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 17.

⁶⁹⁶ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 17.

⁶⁹⁷ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 17.

⁶⁹⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 17.

⁶⁹⁹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 17.

⁷⁰⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 18.

⁷⁰¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 18.

⁷⁰² Derrida, “*Différance*,” 18.

⁷⁰³ Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 18n21.

⁷⁰⁴ Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 18n21.

says so overtly,⁷⁰⁵ there is no breach without difference and no difference without trace.⁷⁰⁶

Second, “the production of unconscious traces and in the processes of inscription (*Niederschrift*) can also be interpreted as moments of *différance*, in the sense of putting in reserve.”⁷⁰⁷ This idea is explained via Freud’s idea of deferred pleasure for the sake of self-preservation when the self is faced with reality. The notion of pleasure is not abandoned, but deferred, since it is perceived to differ with a person’s present reality.

Derrida expands on this idea with reference to Hegel and his notion of *Aufhebung*—translated by Derrida as *la relève*⁷⁰⁸—relating it to “the economic character of *différance*.”⁷⁰⁹ This economy can, once again, be understood in terms of deferred pleasure. A person will defer pleasure in the present moment for a future gain, aware that this deferral will be worth it in the long run. But just because pleasure in the present is deferred does not mean it will necessarily show up:

A certain alterity—to which Freud gives the metaphysical name of the unconscious—is definitively exempt from every process of presentation by means of which we would call upon it to show itself in person. In this context, and beneath this guise, the unconscious is not, as we know, a hidden, virtual, or potential self-presence. It differs from, and defers itself.⁷¹⁰

There is no guarantee that what is unconscious need ever become conscious. There is no way to read “unconscious” traces, since they are not conscious, but also traces are not things retained in our memories that though obscured in the present necessarily appear in the future:

The alterity of the “unconscious” makes us concerned not with horizons of modified—past or future—presents, but with a “past” that has never been present, and never will be, whose future to come will never be a *production* or a reproduction in the form of presence. . . . One

⁷⁰⁵ That is, of course, in Derrida’s reading of Freud.

⁷⁰⁶ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 18.

⁷⁰⁷ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 18.

⁷⁰⁸ “*Aufhebung* literally means ‘lifting up’; but it also contains the double meaning of conservation and negation. For Hegel dialectics is a process of *Aufhebung*: every concept is to be negated and lifted up to a higher sphere in which it is thereby conserved.” The double meaning of the word (not unlike *différance*) *Aufhebung* often causes translators to leave it untranslated. Derrida translates it as *la relève* “which comes from the verb *relever*, which means to lift up, as does *Aufhebung*. But *relever* also means to relay, to relieve, as when one soldier on duty relieves another. Thus the conserving-and-negating lift has become *la relève*, a ‘lift’ in which is inscribed an effect of substitution and difference, the effect of substitution and difference inscribed in the double meaning of *Aufhebung*.” Alan Bass in Derrida, “*Différance*,” 20n23.

⁷⁰⁹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 20.

⁷¹⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 19-20.

cannot think the trace—and therefore, *différance*—on the basis of the present, or of the presence of the present.⁷¹¹

The notion of “a past that has never been present” is used, according to Derrida, by Levinas “to qualify the trace and enigma of absolute alterity: the Other.” In fact, says Derrida, from this perspective “the thought of *différance* implies the entire critique of classical ontology undertaken by Levinas” and one could include others (Freud and Nietzsche are mentioned) who use notions of the trace “as the delimitation of the ontology of presence.”⁷¹²

Since, then, *différance* serves to destabilise “beings and beingness” and the “domination of beings” one could also say that “*différance* is not.”⁷¹³ It dominates or rules nothing: “Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.”⁷¹⁴

In relation to Being and beings, Derrida does concede: “In a certain aspect of itself, *différance* is certainly but the historical and epochal *unfolding* of Being or of the ontological difference.”⁷¹⁵ In understanding this relation of Being to *différance*, Douglas McGaughey’s description in *Strangers and Pilgrims* is helpful:

⁷¹¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 21.

⁷¹² Derrida, “*Différance*,” 21.

⁷¹³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 21.

⁷¹⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 22.

⁷¹⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 22. Derrida, in this section, makes reference to Heidegger and the ontological difference—the relation of Being to beings—and the ontico-ontological difference: “Can *différance* . . . settle down into the division of the ontico-ontological difference, such as it is thought, such as its ‘epoch’ in particular is thought, ‘through,’ if it may still be expressed as such, Heidegger’s uncircumventable meditation?” Derrida, “*Différance*,” 22. In understanding these terms one runs into the difficulty of appreciating Heidegger’s thought (as well as, the daunting task of understanding Derrida’s relation to Heidegger). By way of orientation, I quote a few of the opening lines of *Being and Time*: “Do we in our time have an answer to the question of being [*seiend*]? Not at all. So it is fitting that we should raise anew *the question of the meaning of Being [Sein]*.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1962), 1. Heidegger distinguishes between *das Seiendes* (beings, things) and *Dasein* (human being)—literally “there” (*Da*) “being” (*sein*)—in that “*Dasein* . . . is precisely that ‘Seiende’ which can ask about Being, and, therefore, it is ‘more’ than mere ‘Seiend’ (or more than a mere thing).” Douglas R. McGaughey, *Strangers and Pilgrims: On the Role of Aporiai in Theology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1997), 130. The distinction between ontico-ontological and the ontological can be explicated: “The ethical, on the one hand, is concerned with the actual circumstances of what Heidegger calls the ‘ontic.’ The ‘ontic’ has to do with treating ‘die Seienden’ (persons and things as Others and as objects) as merely ‘over against’ the self as ‘subject.’ The Being question, on the other hand, is concerned with the ontological conditions of possibility for a world to be experienced ontically. In other words, the ontological ‘level’ of analysis is prior to (or ‘deeper than’) the mere ontic ‘level’ of our experiencing of persons and things.” McGaughey, 142.

Being in *Being and Time* means possibility.⁷¹⁶ “Possibility” is neither an object over against Dasein nor is it a material substance uniting all that “is.” Being (or “isness”) is not taken by Heidegger in any sense to mean “substance.” Possibility can only occur as process. It always involves a totality of self and the world. Therefore, Being for Heidegger is not a “thing” or a collection of things, but, rather, an “event” intimately constitutive of Dasein and its entire world.⁷¹⁷

Derrida, however, does not wish to totally equate *différance* with the notion of ontological difference, since he wishes to distance it from “the historical and the epochal.”

Since Being has never had a “meaning,” has never been thought or said as such, except by dissimulating itself in beings, then *différance*, in a certain and very strange way, (is) “older” than the ontological difference or than the truth of Being. When it has this age it can be called the play of the trace. The play of a trace which no longer belongs to the horizon of Being, but whose play transports and encloses the meaning of Being: the play of the trace, of the *différance*, which has no meaning and is not. Which does not belong. There is no maintaining and no depth to this bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play.⁷¹⁸

If one thinks *khôra* at this point, it is possible to discern what Derrida means when he calls *différance* “older” than ontological difference. Since “ontological difference, is but an epoch of *diapherien* [Greek for “difference,” and is a reference to “the Heraclitean play of the *hen diapheron heautoi*”]⁷¹⁹ and “the concept of epochality [belongs] to what is within history as the history of Being,” *différance*, itself, is “the play of the trace” that “is not.”⁷²⁰ It is “older”—the quotation marks cautioning us not to think historically at this point—because it

⁷¹⁶ McGaughey gives credit “to conversations with Joseph Kockelmann for this conclusion.” McGaughey, 139n13.

⁷¹⁷ McGaughey, 139-40.

⁷¹⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 22. In the context of my dissertation this “bottomless chessboard” is not just an endless string of substitutions (each substitution representing a new chessboard, a new game to play), all of which are roughly equivalent; rather each substitution represents an attempt to reach those who are excluded from the current play. As long as there are those who are thrust to the periphery and excluded from the play, another play is required, another substitution. From the perspective of faith, Caputo notes: “Undecidability and substitutability do not form a bottomless pit down which every decision is dropped never to be heard from again. They constitute rather the haze of indefiniteness with which every decision must daily cope The quasi theses of translatability, substitutability, undecidability, open up the space in which faith fights its good fight and tries to save its good name.” Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 63.

⁷¹⁹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 22. The reference is to the Heraclitean saying: “People do not understand how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself. There is a harmony in the bending back, as in the cases of the bow and the lyre” William Harris, “Heraclitus: The Complete Fragments: Translation and Commentary and Greek Text,” under “117,” <http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Philosophy/heraclitus.pdf> (accessed September 28, 2011). In this regard Derrida states: “Perhaps this is why the Heraclitean play of the *hen diapheron heautoi*, of the one differing from itself, the one in difference with itself, is already lost like a trace in the determination of the *diapherein* as ontological difference.” Derrida, “*Différance*,” 22.

⁷²⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 22.

is prior to the notion of ontological difference, in the same sense that *khôra* is prior to everything that is. Nevertheless, *différance* is not *khôra* but perhaps *différance* is the “pre-requisite for” or “nature of” anything (and everything) that is inscribed on *khôra*. Hence, one can speak of “the trace (of that) which can never be presented, the trace which itself can never be presented: that is appear and manifest itself, as such, in its phenomenon.”⁷²¹

Derrida notes that Heidegger wishes to “mark . . . the difference between Being and beings, the forgotten of metaphysics” which “has disappeared without leaving a trace.”⁷²² The point is that since “the very trace of difference has been submerged” and “*différance* (is) (itself) other than absences and presence, if it *traces*, then when it is a matter of forgetting of the difference (between Being and beings), we would have to speak of the disappearance of the trace of the trace.”⁷²³ In other words, since ontological difference is reduced to a trace, *différance* (which “appears” as a trace and is in certain way anterior to ontological difference) is a trace of this trace.

“There is no essence of *différance*.”⁷²⁴ This implies that not only is *différance* “not a ‘species’ of the genus *ontological difference*”⁷²⁵ but also “there is neither a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it engages difference.”⁷²⁶ As such, *différance* remains unnameable. Like *khôra*, to speak of it we have a word—*différance*—but this is an un-word, not, strictly speaking, a neologism (“new word”). When Derrida introduces *différance* he is not trying to bring a new word to the (French) language, as though the language itself is guilty of an oversight by omitting it. “‘Older’ than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language.”⁷²⁷

But we “already” know that if it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this *name*, or because we should have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no *name* for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of “*différance*,” which is

⁷²¹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 23.

⁷²² Derrida, “*Différance*,” 23.

⁷²³ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 23-24.

⁷²⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 25.

⁷²⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 26n26.

⁷²⁶ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 26.

⁷²⁷ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 26.

not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity; and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions.⁷²⁸

And tempting as it may be to align this unnameable with the sacred and possibly even God, no such presence can be attributed to it: “This unnameable is not an ineffable Being which no name could approach: God, for example.”⁷²⁹

Instead, *différance* is associated with play, a concept that tradition would generally regard as anathema with regard to anything sacred. To *play* with the sacred is to violate it. Hence, to “name” *différance* as a genus of the sacred, is a contradiction in terms, which itself is quite in keeping with *différance*:

This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects, the relatively unitary and atomic structures that are called names, the chains of substitutions in which, for example, the nominal effect *différance* is itself *enmeshed*, carried off, reinscribed, just as a false entry or a false exit is still part of the game, a function of the system.⁷³⁰

Différance understood as a play of differences cannot get along with anything stable, anything that cannot allow for difference. The sacred needs a stable point of reference to have meaning, something that is not affected by the vicissitudes of context, establishing a presence that rises above space and time. *Différance* is at odds with this view of the sacred and it is unlikely that *différance* and the idea of a *fundamental* belief can be companions either.

The fundamental beliefs, in a sense, are the principal identifiers of Seventh-day Adventism. They represent a stable and inviolable centre that serves to distinguish those within from all those without. One could even say that the fundamental beliefs are a *sacred* word on the nature of Adventism. And yet, since they are *words*—language—they are subject to *différance*. Although the word fundamental *seems* a stable descriptor, this is merely a facade, particularly, as I will endeavour to show, in the context of historic Adventism.

3.1.3. Fundamentals

The “case study” and “analogy,” the “history” and “myth,” the “truth” and “tradition” at issue is that of the SDA Church and its relation to fundamental belief #6: “Creation.” This is a contribution to a far bigger *discourse* which also should not be identified by pairs representing binary opposites—deconstruction *or* religion, *différance or* God, *and*, perhaps,

⁷²⁸ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 26.

⁷²⁹ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 26.

⁷³⁰ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 26-27.

khôra or Genesis 1:2—the first of each of these pairs supposedly representing the position of this dissertation, which could not be further from the truth (always remembering that not finding a place further from the truth does not at the same time find a place closer to the truth: *khôra*, for example). As I have been trying to demonstrate, there is another way (*triton genos*).

The dilemma is the very idea of the *fundamental*. The very notion of something fundamental is difficult to reconcile with the thought of Jacques Derrida. What is fundamental to *différance*? It is a question that one can ask, but not *seriously*, not without a sense of play. One could glibly respond that *différance* both differs and defers and these are fundamental components of *différance*, which is true up to a point, but only when one simultaneously forgets not only that to actually be fundamental is to subscribe to an endless repetition of the same (hence *not* *différance* at all), but also that *différance*, itself, is not “a word or a concept” and so escapes definition.

There is a contradiction when fundamental beliefs come into contact with *différance*. To submit fundamentals to *différance*⁷³¹ means that they are not fundamental at all or, at least, that one is open to the possibility that they might not be fundamental. And anyone who has constructed a set of norms that are labelled fundamental would scarcely at the same moment be open to the notion that these norms themselves be open to being other than what they are. *Différance*, however, has no such restriction, by which I mean more than that *différance* allows for multiplicity and the advent of something other. Since *différance* could also differ with itself, it *could* defer itself and, for the moment, at least, be a fundamental belief. This movement is necessary, if that which is fundamental is ever going to meet with *différance*. This will happen not because of the *hospitality* of the fundamental that would freely admit *différance* into its *presence*, but rather because *différance* is an unperceived trace that cannot be totally eradicated. *Différance* could be a fundamental belief, if it differed with itself *and* deferred itself. If it did this, it would be both *différance* and a fundamental belief, which is actually not a contradiction at all, since *différance* is a movement within language which itself is the material constructing a fundamental belief. This would be a play of

⁷³¹ The notion of “submitting” something to *différance* is misleading. *Différance* (like deconstruction) is inherent to a text and is not something that is inflicted on a text. *Différance* is frequently unacknowledged (and this is the nature of fundamentalism), but this something else altogether. This is why the subtitle of my dissertation begins “Stumbling on the Creative Play of *Différance*. . .” and in an earlier version was “Acknowledging the Creative Play of *Différance*.” *Différance* can be uncovered in opposition to exclusive readings of texts, but *différance* (is there and) is not alien to the text, as though it attacks interpretations from without.

substitutions: to define Seventh-day Adventism with the fundamental beliefs at the centre is one thing, but to assume that the fundamental beliefs are, in fact, better described as *différance* is something else altogether. And yet, as I will show, historic Adventism is grounded on just such a fundamental. At the centre (there was) *différance*.

Something fundamental is usually understood to be the basis or the essential component of that to which it refers. The fundamentals of Seventh-day Adventism, one would presume, are the very things that define Seventh-day Adventism—remove the fundamentals and you no longer have a Seventh-day Adventist. Is this what is meant by the term “fundamental belief” in an SDA context? The content of the *belief* itself (fundamental belief #6) I will examine in the next section, but for now I would like to examine possible meanings of the descriptor *fundamental*.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual begins with the following words: “In fulfilment of the divine plan the Advent Movement began its prophetic journey toward the kingdom in the year 1844.”⁷³² There was hence a period of around nineteen years before the actual organisation of the General Conference of the SDA Church in 1863. *The Church Manual* informs us that “the Movement’s pioneers walked at first uncertainly. *They were sure of the doctrines they held* [emphasis added], but unsure as to the form of organization, if any, that they should adopt.”⁷³³ This statement possibly implies that from its very inception the doctrines of the SDA Church were “sure” and that they have remained unchanged during the intervening decades. However, in truth, there has been considerable development of the SDA fundamental beliefs over the intervening decades. The proposed change to fundamental belief #6 “Creation” in 2015, which is my direct concern, serves as an adequate enough illustration of this development. In fact, changes to the beliefs at a General Conference in Session are not uncommon.

For the moment I use the word “development” as describing this “movement” over *other* words that may suggest more *fundamental* changes to the SDA belief system: metamorphosis, reformation or, possibly, evolution. The preamble to the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs themselves is instructive:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these

⁷³² *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed. (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2005), xix.

⁷³³ *Church Manual*, xix.

statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.⁷³⁴

There is something almost playful about this statement. First, the idea that SDAs “accept the Bible as their only creed” is offset by the notion of what one might term a *supplement* and a *detour*: the fundamental beliefs. Second, one is bemused by the use of this word “creed” which means “a formal summary of Christian beliefs” or “a set of beliefs or principles.”⁷³⁵ The Bible is identified as the SDA creed, although the Bible is clearly not a creed, but rather a text from which a creed could be derived. Are not the fundamental beliefs stated as a creed—“a formal summary of Christian beliefs” and “a set of beliefs?” And yet it is claimed that they are *not* a creed but a set of *fundamental beliefs*. The point would appear to be that the Bible is the creed (the beliefs of the SDA Church), which cannot be distilled to a shorter form (there is no further “summary” possible), but from this creed (the Bible) one can identify a list of beliefs that are *fundamental*, that is, the ground or the centre upon which all the other beliefs are to be organised: one might say a *logocentric* declaration, by which the other beliefs (the “rest” of the Bible) are to be understood. But to reduce the fundamental beliefs to a logocentric declaration is to overlook the fact that these beliefs are never a final word: “Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session. . . .” In a certain sense they are definitive, but in another they are not.

From this another question arises. If the *creed* of the SDA Church is the Bible, what force or authority do the fundamental beliefs have? For instance, could one claim to “believe in” the Bible only—*sola Scriptura*—and not agree with the fundamental beliefs and yet remain an SDA? The answer is implied in *The Church Manual* under the heading: “Reasons for Which Members Shall Be Disciplined.”⁷³⁶ In fact, this is listed as the first reason (in a list of eleven): “Denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church or teaching doctrines contrary to the same.”⁷³⁷ Although there is a confusion of

⁷³⁴ *Church Manual*, 9.

⁷³⁵ *The Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, 4th ed., s.v. “Creed.”

⁷³⁶ There are two possible outcomes if an SDA is disciplined by the Church and found guilty of the particular charge: 1) Censure: “A vote of censure is for a stated period of time, from a minimum of one month to a maximum of twelve months; it terminates the erring one’s election or appointment to any and all offices he or she may hold in the church, and removes the privilege of election to office while under censure;” and 2) Disfellowship: “To disfellowship a member means to expel an individual from membership.” *Church Manual*, 168.

⁷³⁷ *Church Manual*, 168-69.

terminology in that the term “fundamental beliefs” is not mentioned, it is fair to say that what *could be meant* by either or both of the statements “fundamentals of the gospel” and “the cardinal doctrines of the church” is the fundamental beliefs. Hence, a denial of the fundamental beliefs (or any one of them) is a valid reason to expel a member from the SDA Church. In the context of the SDA Church, in theory, at least, the authority of the fundamental beliefs is absolute (they determine whether or not one is a Seventh-day Adventist), *not*, and this must be emphasised, the Bible (accepting, of course, that SDA interpreters would consider the beliefs to be *based* on the Bible). But, this understanding is only an implication because, if this were the case, one would not expect the *The Church Manual* to arbitrarily change the terminology from “fundamental beliefs” to “fundamentals of the gospel” and “the cardinal doctrines of the church.” This confusion of terminology seems to suggest something “other,” something unmentioned.

This leads to the paradoxical affirmation in the preamble to the fundamental beliefs: “*Revision of these statements may be expected* at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.” But if these beliefs are *fundamental*, the very ground, the bedrock upon which the edifice known as Seventh-day Adventism is built, how can they be subject to revision “at a General Conference session” (which happens every five years)?

In 1872 the Adventist press at Battle Creek, Michigan, published a “synopsis of our faith” in 25 propositions. This document, slightly revised and expanded to 28 sections,⁷³⁸ appeared in the denominational yearbook in 1889. This was not continued in subsequent issues In response to an appeal from church leaders in Africa . . . a committee of four, including the president of the General Conference, prepared a statement encompassing “the principal features” of belief as they “may be summarized.” This statement of 22 fundamental beliefs, first printed in the 1931 *Yearbook*, stood until the 1980 General Conference session replaced it with a similar but more comprehensive, summarization in 27 paragraphs, published under the title “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.”⁷³⁹

The very idea of a revision of *fundamental* beliefs is somewhat of a contradiction in terms, even if one defers responsibility of this revision to God: “Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church *is led by the Holy Spirit* [emphasis added] to a fuller understanding of Bible truth” The basic inference being that

⁷³⁸ The number 28 is purely coincidental, while one could find similarities with the current 28 fundamental beliefs, the idea that this is basically the same outline of beliefs is unfounded.

⁷³⁹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington DC: Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), iv.

what was fundamental is no longer fundamental, which means that what was fundamental actually wasn't fundamental at all.

Historically SDAs have been opposed to identifying themselves with a creed, which explains why the preamble to the fundamentals contains the claim that "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed." The first SDA General Conference president, James White, asserted in agreement with other church founders: "The Bible is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed. We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit; embracing the faith that thus the Lord will teach us from time to time. And in this we take a position against the formation of a creed."⁷⁴⁰ Despite this claim, though, James White nevertheless "introduced the idea of a 'church covenant'" which was basically a sentence-long description that connected SDAs with the notion of keeping "the commandments and the faith of Jesus." Objectors were appeased with the assurance that a covenant is not a creed.⁷⁴¹ Quoting Walter Scragg, Fritz Guy explains the early Adventist fears with regard to the formation of a creed:

The early [Adventist] church leaders came out of bodies that they felt had calcified their beliefs in . . . creedal statements, and [had] fought to defend those statements rather than embark on fresh searches for biblical understanding and truth. The Reformation remained incomplete because it was held back by creeds. They also feared that such statements might become a rival to the freedom of the Spirit that they saw operating in their midst, both in the work of Ellen G. White, and in their various study conferences at which they sought to find answers to perplexing Bible questions.⁷⁴²

Fritz Guy, himself, concludes with something that is no doubt accurate with regard to the crisis that surrounds the proposed revision of fundamental belief #6: "As soon as we produce a statement of belief, some people will stop thinking, stop asking questions, and stop growing. And some people will use the statement to judge others, and to try to exclude from the community those who don't measure up, and to inhibit creative thinking within the community."⁷⁴³

⁷⁴⁰ "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861," *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* 18 no. 19 (October 8, 1861): 148, quoted in Fritz Guy, "Uncovering the Origins of the Statement of Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs," *Spectrum* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 19-20.

⁷⁴¹ Guy, 20.

⁷⁴² Walter L. Scragg, "Doctrinal Statements and the Life and Witness of the Church" (paper presented at workers' meetings in Vasterang, Sweden, and Manchester, England, August 24 to September 4, 1981), quoted in Guy, 20.

⁷⁴³ Guy, 28.

The 1872 list of twenty-five “fundamental principles” was “published as an unsigned pamphlet” with a preamble including the following disclaimer: “In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that *we have no articles of faith, creed or discipline* [emphasis added], aside from the Bible.”⁷⁴⁴ I would argue that although these ideas still persist, there is currently a disruption to these negations. The fundamental principles are now fundamental *beliefs*, thereby explicitly claiming to be a statement of faith. They are hence by definition a creed (even though the Bible is the “only creed” of SDAs). They are also used as a basis for church discipline (even though the fundamental beliefs are not explicitly mentioned in this regard). This means that, although the premise or foundation for what are now the fundamental beliefs was more or less in place from the Church’s inception, the fundamental beliefs and the way they currently function in the Church is alien to historic Adventism. The preamble to this 1872 list of fundamental principles continues in an unequivocal vein deflecting any misunderstanding: “*We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith* [emphasis added], but it is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them.”⁷⁴⁵ In 1882 “W. H. Littlejohn wrote and published a suggested church manual” but “the 1883 General Conference session rejected the proposed manual as unnecessary and potentially dangerous because it would likely lead to uniformity in matters of ‘practice’ and might also stiffen the understanding of ‘faith.’”⁷⁴⁶

W. J. Hackett, vice President of the General Conference, as late as 1977, found resistance when he suggested that a list of fundamental beliefs be prepared since “administrators, church leaders, controlling boards and leaders at all levels of the church will find it easier to evaluate persons already serving the church, and those hereafter appointed, as to their commitment to what is considered basic Adventism.”⁷⁴⁷ While the 1980 General Conference session decided to incorporate the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs in *The Church Manual*, the preamble had the intention of distinguishing these fundamentals from

⁷⁴⁴ *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists* (Battles Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1872), 3, quoted in Guy, 21.

⁷⁴⁵ P. Gerard Damsteegt, “Appendix II: Fundamental Principles of SDA in 1972,” in *Foundations of the SDA Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Association, 1977), 301.

⁷⁴⁶ Rolf J. Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Casestudy in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 190-91.

⁷⁴⁷ W. J. Hackett, “Preserve the Landmarks” *Review and Herald* 154, no. 21 (May 26, 1977): 2, quoted in Pöhler, 193.

the force of a creed. Rolf Pöhler concludes that “it can be said, while the early Adventists emphasized the purely descriptive and informative nature of their statements of faith, by now [2000] the Fundamental Beliefs have assumed a prescriptive and normative function in the church.”⁷⁴⁸

Interesting, but not particularly helpful, is the manner in which members are accepted into SDA membership. This is done via baptism accompanied by assent to what is termed the “Baptismal Covenant” which is given the following description:

A summary of doctrinal beliefs, prepared especially for the instruction of candidates for baptism, together with Baptismal Vow and Certificate of Baptism have been adopted by the denomination as a baptismal covenant. . . . Each candidate should be thoroughly familiar with the teachings contained in this outline and with the duties enjoined upon believers and by practise demonstrate a willing acceptance of all the doctrines taught by Seventh-day Adventists⁷⁴⁹

The “summary of doctrinal beliefs” consists of thirteen short statements that certainly contain far less information than the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs. However, the eleventh point serves to fill in the gaps: “11. Do you know and understand the fundamental Bible principles as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Do you purpose, by the grace of God, to fulfill His [*sic*] will by ordering your life in harmony with these principles?”⁷⁵⁰

However, if one is to ask the nature of historic Adventism, then it is quite clear that the message is “no articles of faith, creed or discipline, aside from the Bible.” The role of fundamentals is descriptive and, one might add, only *generally* descriptive or *approximately* descriptive. A fundamental belief that serves to exclude people who do not conform to its description is out of step with historic Adventism. At the centre was the Bible, the Bible with *no creed* as a supplement. And if a set of fundamental beliefs were to be placed at the centre in order produce some sort of clarity, this set of beliefs would encounter something more fundamental to Adventism—no fundamentals in Adventism. To be true to historic Adventism, fundamental beliefs should always be seen as a supplement open to the play of substitutions that should never in and of themselves be sacralised. To phrase this in Derrida’s language, if there is a centre in historic Adventism it (is) *différance*. That is fundamental.

Before turning to the idea that Genesis 1 should be understood in terms of literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days, I would like to suggest another centre. This centre is

⁷⁴⁸ Pöhler, 195.

⁷⁴⁹ *Church Manual*, 31-32.

⁷⁵⁰ *Church Manual*, 33.

like *khôra*. It has no evident substance and is not part of the created order, but is rather the receptacle or place upon which creation is inscribed. I am referring to Genesis 1:2 (“the earth was without form and void”). In a way, this is the logical centre of Genesis 1, although an unstable one. It is on this centre that God’s *play* of creation happens. For my purposes, therefore, it is also the logical centre on which the *play* of discourse can flourish, a play that displaces itself and allows for other centres which in turn are displaced. In short, if Genesis 1:2 is like *khôra*, its other name is (to use Derrida’s non-word) *différance*.

3.2. Without Form and Void

There is a reference to “something” that is analogous to Plato’s *khôra* in Genesis 1. Genesis 1:2 presents an evident break in continuity between verses one and three. The first verse refers to the creative acts of God: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;”⁷⁵¹ the second verse presents “the earth” as inert and “the Spirit of God” as “hovering” (*not* creating): “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters;”⁷⁵² verse three and on (concluding at 2:4a) again presents creative acts of God commencing with “And God said, ‘Let there be light’” (1:3a)—the creation of what might be termed the “sensible” or physical world (in an SDA understanding), culminating in the inactivity of the seventh day of rest (Genesis 1:3-2:4a).

In the first place, I acknowledge the location of Genesis 1:2, in the flow of the narrative, as being placed between “creations.” There is a creation of “the heavens and the earth” in Genesis 1:1 and then “another” creation in Genesis 1:3-2:4. This is not unlike the structure of the *Timaeus* where Plato locates his discussion on *khôra* in between the creation of the sensible world and the creation of the intelligible world: *khôra* in the *Timaeus* is located between “creations.” More importantly, the phrasing of Genesis 1:2 is almost absurdly comparable to *khôra*. It contains at least three terms that are evocative of Plato’s *khôra*: “formless” (*tohu*); “empty” (*bohu*); and “the deep” (*tehom*). It is a parallel that John Caputo suggests is intended by Derrida, although it is not a point that Derrida expands on:

... Derrida's reinscription of khora into deconstruction is, as often happens, not a purely Greek operation but a Jewgreek one, and how the khoral picture of things that emerges in deconstruction has, accordingly, an oddly biblical flavour. When he says khora, he is not

⁷⁵¹ Gen. 1:1 (NIV).

⁷⁵² Gen. 1:2 (NIV).

simply drawing upon the *Timaeus*, which is the manifest reference, but there is also, for anyone with the ears to hear, an allusion being made to the opening verses of Genesis. My contention is that there is a desert scene—a biblical desert, but then a desert within the desert—that presides over everything in deconstruction, and provides the setting for his prayers and tears. My contention is that everything in deconstruction is marked by a memory of the primal scene of creation, whether or not Derrida remembers.⁷⁵³

My concern here is not to ascertain whether or not “deconstruction is marked by a memory of the primal scene of creation” by “an allusion . . . to the opening verses of Genesis.” Any such connections merely serve as a fortuitous detour. My direct concern is to suggest a “decentring centre” in a reading of Genesis 1 that itself is not definitive but a play of *différance*.

The phrase “without form and void” (AV)—*tohu wabohu*—is found elsewhere in Scripture (e.g. Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23), but each of these occurrences “seem to be borrowed from this text.”⁷⁵⁴ Such derivations return one to Genesis 1:2 to discover its meaning. However, “*tohu* alone is frequently employed as synonymous with nonexistence, or nothingness,”⁷⁵⁵ e.g. “All nations before him [*sic*] are as nothing; and they are counted to him [*sic*] less than nothing, and vanity [*tohu*];”⁷⁵⁶ “Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought [*tohu*], and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God;”⁷⁵⁷ and, more relevantly, “He stretcheth out the north over the empty place [*tohu*], and hangeth the earth upon nothing.”⁷⁵⁸ *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* is relatively vocal in its description of *tohu*: “From an unused root meaning to lie waste; a *desolation* (of surface), that is, *desert*; figuratively a *worthless* thing; adverbially in *vain*: - confusion, empty place, without form, nothing, (thing of) nought, vain, vanity, waste, wilderness.”⁷⁵⁹ *Tohu*, interestingly “has no certain cognates in other

⁷⁵³ Caputo, “Before Creation,” 92.

⁷⁵⁴ Nichol, 1:209.

⁷⁵⁵ Nichol, 1:209.

⁷⁵⁶ Isa. 40:17 (AV).

⁷⁵⁷ Isa. 49:4 (AV).

⁷⁵⁸ Job 26:7 (AV).

⁷⁵⁹ James Strong, “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary,” in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: With Brief Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words of the Original with References to the English Words*, s.v. “8414.”

languages”⁷⁶⁰ and is “from an unused root,” supplying an almost gratifying lack of reference when placed alongside *khôra*.

Bohu has a meaning that “is uncertain”⁷⁶¹ and always occurs in conjunction with *tohu*. The phrase “*tohu wabohu* has been variously understood as a hendiadys,” meaning “a formless waste” or “absolutely nothing whatever” or, possibly, “void and vacancy”⁷⁶² The Septuagint renders *aoratos kai akataskeuastos* for *tohu wabohu* meaning literally “invisible and unformed.” Possibly, the “invisibility” of the earth is merely an attempt by the translators to reflect the notion of “darkness upon the face of the deep” since darkness prevents seeing. Certainly, the Greek rendition lacks the alliterative force of *tohu wabohu* as indeed do the English translations.

The word for deep—*tehom*—is a partner to *tohu* in Old Testament Hebrew word study books, in the sense of alphabetical order, i.e. *tehom* follows *tohu* in the dictionary.⁷⁶³ It is unlikely that this is purely coincidence and may suggest that related meanings of *tohu* and *tehom* be preferred. “A number of times” in the Old Testament, one might even say, usually, *tehom* “is used merely for a large body of water.”⁷⁶⁴ In Genesis 1:2 the word “deep” is favoured by a majority of translations.⁷⁶⁵ The *Good News Bible* removes ambiguity by suggesting “the raging ocean.” Similar is “a roaring ocean” in the *Contemporary English Version*. Of slightly more interest is the *New English Bible* translating *tehom* as abyss. Both Strong—“abyss” and “deep (place)”⁷⁶⁶—and Young—“deep place”⁷⁶⁷—carry this meaning. The Septuagint concurs, using *abyssou*: “Originally an adjective for an implied ‘earth,’ *abyssos* is used in Greek for the depths of original time, the primal ocean, and the world of the dead. In the LXX it denotes the original flood, then the realm of the dead (e.g. Ps.

⁷⁶⁰ *Theological Wordbook*, s.v. “2494.”

⁷⁶¹ *Theological Wordbook*, s.v. “2494.”

⁷⁶² *Theological Wordbook*, s.v. “2494.”

⁷⁶³ For example, Strong numbers *tohu* 8414 and *tehom* 8415; and Harris, Gleason and Archer number them 2494a and 2495a.

⁷⁶⁴ *Theological Wordbook*, s.v. “2495.”

⁷⁶⁵ For example, AV, NIV, RSV, ASV and EV.

⁷⁶⁶ Strong, s.v. “8415.”

⁷⁶⁷ Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers), s.v. “Deep.”

71:20).”⁷⁶⁸ The New Testament uses the word without recourse to the associated connotation of an ocean of water: “In the NT it is a prison for antichrist (Rev. 11:7), demons (Lk. 8:31), scorpions (Rev. 9:3ff.), and spirits (Rev. 9:1; 20:1, 3). It is a well-like abyss from which smoke ascends (Rev. 9:1). Satan will be shut up there for a thousand-year period (Rev. 20:1, 3). In Rom. 10:7 it simply denotes the realm of the dead.”⁷⁶⁹

Having just described “the earth” as an amorphous nothingness (*tohu wabohu*), it is improbable that the earth is now an actual body of water—that is *not nothing* after all. The parallelism of Genesis 1:2b and 1:2c does not easily succumb to a “literal” reading:

Genesis 1:2b

A. And darkness was

B. upon the face

C. of the deep

Genesis 1:2c

A. and the Spirit of God moved

B. upon the face

C. of the waters

On its own, the clause “and darkness was upon the face of the deep” carries no essential meaning of anything substantive that would contradict the nothingness of *tohu wabohu*. The second phrase “upon the face” represents an evident personification not to be taken literally in either occurrence. The fact that it is “the *Spirit* of God” that moves “upon the face of the waters” is intriguing in that it stands in stark contrast to the usage in verse 1 as well as verse 3ff. It is God (*Elohim*) who creates (verse 1 and 3ff.) but it is the *Spirit* (*ruach*) of God (*Elohim*) that “moves” (*rachaph*) in verse 2. The Authorised Version’s use of the verb “to move” is, perhaps, inconsistent considering the rest of the verse. *Rachaph* can mean, “brood” or “relax” or “hover.”⁷⁷⁰ God creates, but the *Spirit* of God is inactive in a state of “relaxation.” Although Christian commentators have frequently wished to infer evidence of the Trinitarian notion of God in the verse, and no doubt this is an appealing idea, this inference is a completely independent theological thought that should not interfere with the

⁷⁶⁸ Bromiley, s.v. “*Ábyssos*,”

⁷⁶⁹ Bromiley, s.v. “*Ábyssos*,”

⁷⁷⁰ *Theological Wordbook*, s.v. “2149.”

point being made. In addition, the very idea of spirit (*ruach*) implies a lack of anything substantial and its alignment with *rachaph* implies an inert lack of substance.

The final phrase is “of the waters” which the parallelism could imply as a literal descriptor of “the deep.” To do this, however, is to contradict the momentum of the verse. In fact, there is something curiously paradoxical about the verse which becomes evident if one places the *first* clause alongside the *third* clause in a chiasm:

A. And the earth (‘*erets*)

B. was without form and void . . .

B`. and the Spirit of God moved

A`. upon the face of the waters (*mayim*).

Clearly, the earth and the waters are distinguished from one another in the creative activity of God: “And God said, Let the waters [*mayim*] under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so. And God called the dry *land* Earth [‘*erets*]; and the gathering together of the waters [*mayim*] called he [*sic*] Seas: and God saw that *it was* good.”⁷⁷¹ One could presume, therefore, that *mayim* in verse 2 is metaphorical, implying an amorphous nothingness or, alternatively, it is something quite distinct from the earth where the Spirit of God waits to commence with God’s creative activity. To restate this idea: The earth was without form and void and the Spirit of God was *not* there. The Spirit of God was elsewhere, relaxing upon the face of the waters (we might say, colloquially, that God was “on holiday”).

But this idea, though quite quaint, is not possible in relation to the emptiness that is *khôra*, because *khôra* does not allow for any “elsewhere.” There is no outside, no beyond or other that is separated from *khôra*. The very notion of *khôra* is that whatever is said or written or done is *inscribed* on *khôra*. This means that what is antithetical to *khôra* only *appears* as such, because there is no such thing as being antithetical to *khôra*, rather one is dealing with an inscription on *khôra*. The inactivity of the Spirit of God hovering on the face of the waters is an inscription on the nothingness, whether one wishes to name this *place* “‘*erets*” or

⁷⁷¹ Gen. 1:9-10 (AV).

“*khôra*” or “*tehom*.” I include this point (and perhaps I have argued in a similar fashion elsewhere) for the sake of explication, but quite obviously this blatant imposition of *khôra* onto the meaning of Genesis 1:2 is problematic (certainly in an SDA understanding). My argument, in general, though is that the centre “without form and void” is an intrinsically decentring idea (like *khôra*), but does not really require recourse to (Derrida’s explication of) *khôra* in order to function as a decentring centre (*triton genos*).

To reiterate, then, within the flow of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, Genesis 1:2 is analogous to *khôra*. Beyond this, though, is the fact that verse 2, itself, presents a structure that is similarly analogous to *khôra*. This is evident when one observes, as noted above, that “the deep” (an abyss of nothingness) could follow a parallel thought with verse 2a which describes “the earth as without form and void.” Alternatively, “the deep” (a raging ocean) could follow a parallel thought with verse 2c which describes the “Spirit of God as hovering over the waters.” 2a and 2c both suggest a presence—earth (*‘erets*) and waters (*mayim*)—which more particularly belong to the created order and not *khôra*, whereas the more incorporeal description in 2b (“and darkness was on the face of the deep”) is the chasm that lies between the two. Hence, Genesis 1:2 *within itself* is analogous to Plato’s structure of *khôra* in the *Timaeus*.

Andrews University biblical scholar Richard Davidson⁷⁷² outlines, with reference to these verses, what he calls the “passive gap theory” and the “no gap theory.” Both views “are subheadings of biblical cosmogony in Gen 1 that may be termed the *initial ‘unformed-unfilled’* view.”

According to this . . . view (and common to both the “no gap” and “passive gap” theories), Gen 1:1 declares that God created “the heavens and earth” out of nothing⁷⁷³ at the time of their absolute beginning. Verse 2 clarifies that when (at least) the earth was first created, it was in a state of *tohû* “unformed” and *bohû* “unfilled.” Verse 3ff. then describes the divine process of forming the unformed and filling the unfilled.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷² I have referenced two SDA scholars (Richard Davidson and Fernando Canale), because they are significant scholars in the SDA Church (as employees of Andrews University, generally considered by SDAs to be the most significant SDA tertiary institution in the world, as well as being representative of mainstream Adventist theological thought) and both hold positions that lend support to “An Affirmation of Creation” (the document behind the proposed change to fundamental belief #6).

⁷⁷³ Whether Genesis 1 presents *creatio ex nihilo* or not is something that could be debated. However, I am not concerned to argue the validity of this claim although it is quite a pervasive understanding amongst SDAs generally. Interestingly the idea is not present in fundamental belief #6.

⁷⁷⁴ Richard Davidson, “The Biblical Account of Origins,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 20-21.

With regard to this “forming and filling” of the earth, Davidson affirms that this “creative activity of God is accomplished in six successive literal twenty-four hour days” and that by the end of this creation week “what God began in v. 1 is now completed.”⁷⁷⁵ The “no gap theory” would imply that Genesis 1:1-2 is an integral part of the first day of creation (concluding in verse 5) whereas the “passive gap theory,” preferred by Davidson, suggests that “the ‘raw materials’ of the earth in their unformed-unfilled state were created before—perhaps long before—the seven days of creation week.”⁷⁷⁶ Davidson likens God to a “potter or architect” who “first gathers his [*sic*] materials, and then at some point later begins shaping the pot on the potter’s wheel or constructing the building.”⁷⁷⁷ In Genesis 1:1 God creates what Davidson calls (always enclosed in inverted commas) the “raw materials” and at some point later, named “the appropriate creative moment,” God “began to form and fill the earth in the six literal days of creation week.”⁷⁷⁸ The gap between these two creation events is indeterminate since “the text of Gen 1:1 does not indicate how long before creation week the universe (‘heavens and earth’) was created. It could have been millions or billions of years.”⁷⁷⁹

Davidson’s peer at Andrew’s University, systematic theologian Fernando Canale, agrees with Davidson’s summation (and specifically references Davidson’s article) iterating that the repetitive sentence, first appearing in verse 3, “and God said” is a “literary device” that clearly signifies the starting point of the six day creative activity of God. In this way, “the text distinguishes clearly between the creation of heaven and earth at the beginning and the creation of life on earth, perhaps billions of years later.”⁷⁸⁰

Davidson takes the juxtaposition of the words “heaven” and “earth” to indicate the creation of the universe in its totality. The phrase “the heavens and the earth” (a merism)⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁵ Davidson, 21.

⁷⁷⁶ Davidson, 21.

⁷⁷⁷ Davidson, 23.

⁷⁷⁸ Davidson, 23.

⁷⁷⁹ Davidson, 22.

⁷⁸⁰ Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Lithothec, 2005), 204.

⁷⁸¹ Davidson defines a “merism (or merismus)” as “a statement of opposites denoting totality.” Davidson, 32n88. In this instance, then, the phrase “the heavens and the earth” (if understood as a merism) refers to the Universe.

found in Genesis 1:1 is reiterated with the *same* meaning: “Thus the heavens and the earth and all their host were finished”⁷⁸² and “[t]his is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created.”⁷⁸³ Davidson deduces that since these latter verses fall at the end of the narrative of the six day creation of the earth that “the creation of the whole universe is finally completed when the creation week of this earth is finished!”⁷⁸⁴ Davidson suggests that the creation of the “earth,” in particular, spanning Genesis 1:3 to Genesis 2:4a is a distinct creative act that is chronologically *after* the creation of the universe in Genesis 1:1 (by possibly billions of years). This distinction is evident since “there is wide recognition among Genesis commentators that when used together as a pair in the Hebrew Bible, the dyad of terms ‘the heavens and the earth’ constitute a merism for the totality of all creation, i.e. the entire universe, and that such is the case also in Gen. 1:1.”⁷⁸⁵ However, during the actual “days” of creation (Genesis 1:3ff.) one finds, unlike Genesis 1:1, that when “the heavens” and “the earth” are named “they do not have the article.”⁷⁸⁶ In addition and “more importantly, in Gen. 1:1 one encounters a dyad of terms (‘the heavens and the earth’), whereas later in Gen. 1 one finds a triad: ‘heavens,’ ‘earth,’ and ‘sea’ (vv. 8, 10).”⁷⁸⁷ For Davidson, this triad serves to distinguish the specific creation of this earth (1:3ff.) and the universe (1:1).

Davidson, therefore, has three movements in the creation of the universe: 1) The creation of the universe *ex nihilo* including the raw materials that constitute the earth (verse 1); 2) The “raw materials” of the earth “passively” awaiting formation for possibly billions of years (verse 2); 3) The “filling” and “forming” of the earth (verse 3ff.). The creation week, for Davidson, represents the “finishing touch” to the creation of the entire universe which “may hint at the special significance attached by God to the creation of this particular planet.”⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸² Genesis 2:1 (RSV).

⁷⁸³ Genesis 2:4a (RSV).

⁷⁸⁴ Derrida, “*Différance*,” 33.

⁷⁸⁵ Davidson, 32.

⁷⁸⁶ Davidson, 32.

⁷⁸⁷ Davidson, 32.

⁷⁸⁸ Davidson, 34.

Davidson acknowledges an evident incoherence in his construction: The earth (which is part of the universe) cannot be created *after* (billions of years) the universe is created (Genesis 1:1) even though it signifies its completion (Genesis 2:1):

It has been widely suggested that the term “the heavens and earth” always refers to a *completed* and *organized* universe in Scripture, and thus cannot include the creation of an “unformed and unfilled” earth (so, e.g. Waltke, *Genesis*, 60). But several recent studies have shown that the essential meaning of “the heavens and the earth” is not completion and organization, but totality. See, e.g., Wenham, 12-15; Rooker, 319-320. Thus, while the term “heavens and earth” may indeed refer to an organized, finished universe elsewhere in Scripture, this need not control the unique nuance here in Gen 1:1. Matthew, 142, clarifies: “Although the phrase ‘heavens and earth’ surely points to a finished universe where it is found elsewhere in the Old Testament, we cannot disregard the fundamental difference between those passages and the context presented in Genesis 1 before us, namely, that the expression may be used uniquely here since it concerns the exceptional event of creation itself. To insist on its meaning as a finished universe is to enslave the expression to its uses elsewhere and ignore the contextual requirements of Genesis 1. ‘Heavens and earth’ here indicates the totality of the universe, not foremostly an organised, completed universe.”⁷⁸⁹

The argument defending this inconsistent interpretation of “the heavens and the earth” is: first, that the term represents “totality” and “not completion and organization.” This means that the universe was created *in its totality* in Genesis 1:1 and yet awaited further “organization” for its “completion.” But this also means that *all ex nihilo* creation was completed before Genesis 1:3 and that the so-called “creative” acts of God described in the six days of creation were really a rearranging and manufacturing operation involving various pre-existing raw materials. In other words, one has to contend with the fact that for all of the “Let there be” utterances of God, one is *not* referring to creation *ex nihilo* at all—an interpretation that would not find favour with too many conservative Seventh-day Adventists.⁷⁹⁰ Even Canale suggests: “We should not attempt to understand creation in analogy to human creativity. Human creativity is the process of organizing a pre-existent material reality using various combinations of already existent design patterns.”⁷⁹¹ Notwithstanding the fact that Canale acknowledges a creation of the universe unspecified eons ago (Genesis 1:1), it would seem that the bulk of God’s creative acts—in terms of the length of the narrative (Genesis 1:3-2:1)—are profoundly analogous to “human creativity.”

⁷⁸⁹ Davidson, 33n90.

⁷⁹⁰ It should be noted, however, that although the notion of *ex nihilo* creation is quite commonly believed by SDAs, the idea is not expressed in the fundamental beliefs of the SDA Church. In this sense, Davidson’s idea of existing “raw materials” (which he indicates were created *ex nihilo*) from which God then creates the earth is not out of step with the SDA fundamental belief.

⁷⁹¹ Canale, *Basic Elements*, 201.

Furthermore, the extent of this rearranging and organising cannot be specifically determined outside of the notion of what is meant by “the earth was formless and empty” (Genesis 1:2a). Davidson would have “the earth” in this context mean *the Earth* as that planet which orbits the sun in our solar system. But there are no internal indicators to assist in this designation since the very notion of a “planet” is scarcely a self-evident presence in Genesis 1. Was this organization of the “formless and empty” a reference to that part of the earth that was known and understood by the Hebrews, what we would term the Ancient Near East? Was it, perhaps, an even smaller area—Eden—which seems to have had a utopian (organised?) inside, where Adam and Eve were first located (Genesis 2:8) and a less desirable (unorganised?) outside, to where they were banished (Genesis 3:23-24)? Or, perhaps, one might expand the size of this newly organised domain to a bigger continent, or the whole planet, or, possibly, the solar system, or the galaxy, or the universe?

Second, Davidson suggests that the unique interpretation of the phrase “heaven and earth” is one that is demanded by a unique context. I note in passing the recurring Hebrew word “*yom*” (day) also located in this “unique context.”

The reasons that Davidson requires that the universe already be in place before the creation of this earth are, at least, twofold. First, the SDA Church has as one of its fundamental beliefs (#8), “The Great Controversy:”

All humanity is now involved in a Great Controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. *This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God’s adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin [emphasis added].* This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.⁷⁹²

The Great Controversy precedes the creation of this world meaning that the universe must already have been in existence before the “days” of Genesis 1. Davidson only obliquely references the notion of a pre-existing universe in relation to the Great Controversy theme. After suggesting that the creation of planet earth has a “special significance attached to it by God,” he adds that this idea is further illuminated “by all the onlooking ‘sons of God’ and

⁷⁹² *Church Manual*, 11.

‘morning stars’ (unfallen inhabitants of the universe, Job 38:7).”⁷⁹³ Canale is more explicit in connecting the logic of the passive gap theory to the Great Controversy:

The existence of the angelic host serving God before the creation of the world gives time for Lucifer’s rebellion against God’s design of creation in Christ [meaning the plan for the creation of planet earth] to develop, mature, and spread to other angelic beings (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). Thus he [*sic*] became Satan the murderer and the Father of lies in Genesis 3:1.⁷⁹⁴

The second reason is in order to find some sort of accord with the “billions of years” that modern science suggests for the age of the universe (this, notwithstanding the fact that there is no similar accord with regard to the age of the earth or, at least, *life* on the earth). It is not that either Davidson or Canale specifically suggest this as a motivation (after all they are claiming to operate under a principle of *sola scriptura*), but it is hard to draw any other conclusion from their parenthetical statements suggesting that the passive gap could be “millions” or, even, “billions” of years in duration.⁷⁹⁵ However, one should give Davidson due credit as he is not unequivocal in his stance, stating that he only has a “preference” for the passive gap theory: “Despite my preference for the passive gap over the no gap theory, I acknowledge a possible openness of Gen 1:1-2 that allows for either option.” He then goes on to acknowledge that one can, via the passive gap theory, allow for a far longer chronology (millions or billions of years) “for interpreting the prefossil layers of the geological column.”⁷⁹⁶

Both the passive gap and no gap theories, however, are tied to the notion of the progression of historical days of 24 hours each. But, as with *khôra*, it seems to me that Genesis 1:2 cannot be tied to any *sense* of time. History is measured by events that unfold over time. If there are no events—absolutely no activity, no change, no objective or external means to measure a change—then there can be no history, no entry can be made in a text book, no inscription to describe a “happening.” Perhaps, one may wish to argue that a watching God could perhaps record the duration of this nothingness, but this is not explicitly stated or necessarily implied. God in the shape of the “Spirit of God” has been placed within the system as being in a state of inactivity. The nothingness awaits inscription and in the context of Genesis 1:2, this inscription is the creation of the heavens and the earth, but within

⁷⁹³ Davidson, 34.

⁷⁹⁴ Canale, *Basic Elements*, 206.

⁷⁹⁵ Davidson, 22, 25; and Canale, *Basic Elements*, 204.

⁷⁹⁶ Davidson, 25.

Genesis 1:2 the Spirit hovering upon the face of the waters is an inscription upon the nothingness, as indeed is “the darkness upon the face of the deep.” There is no objective place outside of the void. In this sense it is infinite in extent, though, of course, it fills neither space nor time.

For Canale, “the God of Scripture is not timeless but infinitely and analogously temporal, He [*sic*] creates and saves acting directly from within the sequence of natural and human historical events.”⁷⁹⁷ Hence every story in the Bible “forms part not only of the history of God, but also of the history of our planet.”⁷⁹⁸ Canale rejects the various views of “Christian theologians” who “have come to believe that God’s act of creation did not take place in history” and have postulated alternatives such as “myth [Bultmann], saga [Barth] or literary framework [Gibson].”⁷⁹⁹ Canale holds that one cannot relinquish the historical nature of creation without at the same time abandoning “the biblical history of redemption and along with it the future of the eschatological history of God with His [*sic*] redeemed Church in eternity.”⁸⁰⁰

Canale, hence, presents an interpretive framework (historical) that tends to exclude others (myth, saga and literary framework). This he does by implying that any other position is simultaneously arguing that the creation narrative has no relation to reality. Briefly examining Karl Barth’s notion of saga is illuminating.⁸⁰¹ Barth treads a line between myth and history that never totally affirms or rejects either. Barth’s argument stems from the very idea of the creation of everything that is: “If we take this idea seriously, it must be at once clear that we are not confronted by a realm which in any sense may be accessible to human view or even to human thought.” Hence Barth can acknowledge natural science which “may tell us the tale of the millions of years in which the cosmic process has gone,” but on the other hand cannot comment with regard to the “sheer beginning, with which the concept of creation and the Creator has to do.” For the same reason creation myths are excluded since “at best a myth may be a parallel to exact science; that is, a myth has to do with viewing what

⁷⁹⁷ Canale, *Basic Elements*, 211.

⁷⁹⁸ Canale, *Basic Elements*, 211.

⁷⁹⁹ Canale, *Basic Elements*, 211. The assigning of these ideas to Bultmann, Barth and Gibson are insertions Canale makes in his endnotes. Canale, *Basic Elements*, 228n12-n14.

⁸⁰⁰ Canale, *Basic Elements*, 211.

⁸⁰¹ This cursory examination of saga in Barth is provided merely as a counter to Canale’s position. It is not an attempt to elevate Barth’s position above that of Canale’s although it does stand as a possible alternative.

has always existed and will exist.” Myths are proclaimed in order to confront the problems that are common to humanity. “Myth considers the world as it were from its frontier, but always the world which already exists. There is no creation myth because creation as such is simply not accessible to myth.” But in the same way, creation is not accessible to history: “The Bible speaks in Genesis 1 and 2 of events which lie outside of historical knowledge.” Since the biblical creation story is neither myth nor history, Barth finds a third way which he names “saga.” But saga is neither a wholesale rejection of myth nor that of history. With regard to myth “we can say that certain mythical elements are to be found there.” With regard to history, while it may “lie outside of our historical knowledge” it “is related to history. In fact, the wonderful thing about the biblical creation narratives is that they stand in strict connexion with the history of Israel and so with the story of God’s action in the covenant with man [*sic*].”⁸⁰²

What Canale appears to mean by historical is that “it really happened.” But clearly any theologian who is going to postulate that the origin of creation is God, is not going to argue whether it actually happened or not. The presence of creation itself serves as evidence enough. The point for Barth is that, strictly speaking, the event of creation cannot be properly designated as history since it “lies outside of historical knowledge.” He does not mean to say that there was no creation event. In this regard, one need just briefly note the limitations of Genesis 1 when regarded as a historical record. While it is true that history may be identified with events within a stream of time and Genesis 1 contains both of these elements, there is nevertheless an internal paradox. How is one to record that a day (of twenty-four hours) has elapsed, when the very concept of a day does not yet exist? How is one to designate the passage of time by evening and morning, when there is no such thing as evening and morning? It scarcely needs mentioning that to measure these things, one requires an intact solar system, something that did not exist until the fourth day (Genesis 1:14-19)—the implication being, quite obviously, that only by the fifth day could one begin to speak of the passage of time in this manner. So while traditional SDA views of the creation week may insist on a literal reading of Genesis 1, these views also have to contend with the fact that much of what is said is questionable *from a literal and historical perspective*. For example, when the text informs us that “there was evening and there was morning” for the first, second and third days, we simultaneously know that this cannot *literally* be the case. Paradoxes of this nature are simply a consequence of defining an event anterior to history as historical.

⁸⁰² Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 51.

Genesis 1:2 presents us with the barren desert within the desert, upon which not only the creative actions of God are inscribed as well as the content of this creation (the heavens and the earth), but also the very discourse itself that strives to unpack what is understood and misunderstood, what is possible and impossible, what is true and false, what is probable and improbable. The only thing that is excluded is the notion of exclusion that would suggest that what is inscribed and implied by the heavens and the earth is not the universe in its totality.

3.3. Playing with Genesis 1

All that really remains in this dissertation is to allow the play of *différance* to happen, to allow the other to emerge. Even in the narrowest of definitions *différance* cannot be avoided. The effort within certain significant factions in Seventh-day Adventism is to reduce the interpretations of Genesis 1 to a single possible truth. This endeavour has the goal of sacralising the idea of the “days” in Genesis 1 as being literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days, and through this sacred affirmation, settling on a single distinct interpretation that cannot be gainsaid. However, ideas of *khôra* and *différance* cannot be escaped and it is here that the other is preserved. Despite all efforts to arrive at a single truth that excludes all others, these efforts cannot ultimately be sustained. I will endeavour to show how obvious *différance* really is and how fragile claims to a single ultimate truth really are. There is nothing clever in what remains in this dissertation. It is just play, and in and of itself it would be *fun*, were it not for the fact that those who strive to crystallise the SDA beliefs around a single truth do so in order to exclude all those who do not agree. This is not, therefore, just a game with words and interpretations, it is about the lives of real people and about affirming the validity of their faith (as an alternative), even though their faith differs. A goal of this dissertation is, therefore, to affirm along with the Church founders (and, indeed, sustained in the heterogeneous nature of the Church today) that Seventh-day Adventism should not be governed by a single, unforgiving, unbending, inviolable, *logocentric* affirmation about “days.” Within the Church, there is room for something different; there is space for the other.

3.3.1. Seventh-day Adventism: Fundamental Belief #6

Fundamental belief #6 (Creation) as outlined in the 17th edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* reads as follows:

God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made “the heaven and the earth” and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God.⁸⁰³

It is quite evident that the belief in its current form does not allow for the passive gap theory postulated as a “preference” by Richard Davidson, and acknowledged as a biblically valid possibility by Fernando Canale. The second sentence states that “in six days the Lord made ‘the heaven and the earth.’” This clearly conflates the creation of heaven and earth (Genesis 1:1) and the creation outlined in Genesis 1:3-2:1 into a single creative event, since the creation of “the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1) are now explicitly included in the creation week. It is worth noting that neither Canale nor Davidson have been taken to task for exhibiting their bias in favour of a preference that is at odds with the fundamental beliefs of the SDA Church as they are currently outlined.⁸⁰⁴ There is room to move in SDA theological circles.

As I have noted, this fundamental belief was officially examined: “Because of the pervasive and growing influence of the theory of evolution, the General Conference Executive Committee [of the Seventh-day Adventist Church] (2001 Annual Council) authorized a three-year series of Faith and Science conferences.”⁸⁰⁵ This series of Faith and Science conferences occurred during the period 2002-2004 and produced a report entitled “An Affirmation of Creation.” This document is to be found as an Official Statement on the official website of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (<http://www.adventist.org/>). The website includes, in order of primacy, Fundamental Beliefs, Official Statements and Guidelines. With regard to fundamental belief #6, the Faith and Science conferences concluded:

Concern has been expressed regarding what some see as ambiguity in the phrase “In six days” found in the church’s statement of belief on creation. It is felt that the intended meaning (that the six-day creation described in Genesis was accomplished in a literal and historical week) is

⁸⁰³ *Church Manual*, 10-11.

⁸⁰⁴ This is doubtless because the ideas that they are postulating are perceived “to make no difference.” That is, they do not affect what many consider to be the “essence of Adventism.” This is not necessarily what is stated in the fundamental beliefs (obviously since, for example, fundamental belief #6 is not understood to adequately express this “essence.” If it did there would be no proposed revision of the belief).

⁸⁰⁵ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “An Affirmation of Creation” (October 11, 2004), <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat54.html> (accessed August 14, 2011).

unmentioned. This situation allows for uncertainty about what the church actually believes. Further, it provides room for other explanations of creation to be accommodated in the text. There is a desire for the voice of the church to be heard in bringing added clarity to what is really meant in Fundamental Belief #6.⁸⁰⁶

This statement is curious since the writers of “An Affirmation of Creation” wish to add “clarity to what is *really meant* [emphasis added] in Fundamental Belief #6” and that “the intended meaning (that the six day creation described in Genesis was accomplished in a literal and historical week) is unmentioned.” While it is no doubt true that the “six days” of fundamental belief #6, as it is currently formulated, *could* mean “a literal and historical week,” the apparent dilemma is that it also allows for other possible meanings. But the wording of fundamental belief #6 is *supposed* to be derived from Scripture. The preamble to the 28 fundamental beliefs notes this much:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.⁸⁰⁷

Although the authors of “An Affirmation of Creation” seem to hold that the *intention* of Genesis 1 is to describe “a literal and historical week,” it should also be stressed that Genesis 1 does not explicitly state this. In fact, fundamental belief #6 roughly uses the wording of Genesis 1 and if the fundamental belief “provides room for other explanations of creation to be accommodated in the text” then so does Genesis 1. While it is possible that the Adventists who formulated fundamental belief #6 may well have *really meant* “that the six day creation described in Genesis was accomplished in a literal and historical week,” it is also fair to say that they followed the Bible wording in order to minimise the *interpretive* nature of their task.

On 13 October 2004, the General Conference Executive Committee voted “an affirmation” of “An Affirmation of Creation” as an *additional* official statement which reiterated in précis exactly the same points. It included the following explicit ratification:

We strongly endorse the document’s affirmation of our historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation. . . . We reaffirm the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis 1-11: that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-

⁸⁰⁶ General Conference, “Affirmation of Creation.”

⁸⁰⁷ *Church Manual*, 9.

hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.⁸⁰⁸

The Sabbath (by which is meant Saturday) is a core belief of the SDA Church. In an SDA context, the Sabbath is sacred. It is not possible to reject the Sabbath and remain an SDA. It is not merely embodied as a specific belief among the SDA fundamental beliefs,⁸⁰⁹ but also serves as one of the principal identifying characteristics of the Church. This belief is frequently understood to be derived from the creation narrative as it is explicated in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Since the Sabbath occurs every seventh day and, according to Exodus 20:8-11, is derived from the “seven day” creation narrative of Genesis 1, this is taken to mean that creation must have been a “literal” seven day process as well, that is, seven consecutive 24 hour days.

This idea has been questioned (though, perhaps, not directly) by a certain sector of the SDA Church, most evidently by biology teachers and the like, who cannot reconcile the evidence of evolutionary theory with this literal reading of the creation narrative together with the associated short chronology of earth history (between 6000 and 10000 years). This dilemma has caused a kind of shoring up by the more conservative and traditional SDA believers (up to the highest level of Church leadership) as they attempt to buttress the so-called “traditional” SDA understanding against the supposed onslaught of theistic evolution. On 7 July 2010 the General Conference of the SDA Church released a statement that affirmed that the SDA Church believes “that the biblical events recorded in Genesis 1-11, including the special creation of human beings, are historical and recent, that the seven days of creation were literal 24-hours forming a literal week, and that the Flood was global in nature.”⁸¹⁰ The General Conference Report of the Session then continues:

The day began with a discussion on an item that was not in the original GC agenda, but with the change of regime⁸¹¹ it was added. It was on the issue of Creation and Fundamental Belief 6 that was voted in 1980 in Indianapolis. There was a motion to reaffirm the more extensive 2004 Statement [“An Affirmation of Creation” quoted above] and to initiate the process of integrating both Statements. The fact is that the 6th Fundamental Belief does not include a

⁸⁰⁸ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Response to an Affirmation of Creation” (October 13, 2004), <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat55.html> (accessed August 23, 2011).

⁸⁰⁹ These are outlined (28 beliefs in all) in the *Church Manual*, 9-20.

⁸¹⁰ South England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “General Conference Report 2010” (July 7, 2010), <http://www.secadventist.org/news/48> (accessed October 10, 2011).

⁸¹¹ This report refers to the General Conference Session (the highest authority of the SDA Church) held in Atlanta in June 2010 in which a new president (Ted Wilson) was voted into office.

recent, 24-hour literal day Creation, and the 2004 Statement does. Ted Wilson spoke at length to this. So the proposal was to begin a 5-year process to change Fundamental Belief 6 Both motions on Creation passed overwhelmingly and the delegates affirmed the strong 2004 Statement and voted to begin the 5 year process to change Fundamental Belief 6 to express less ambiguity as to the literal creation event.⁸¹²

Ted Wilson (the current General Conference President of the SDA Church) was the prime instigator of this motion:

In his first major initiative since becoming president, Wilson urged delegates to endorse a response to the 2004 Annual Council affirmation “that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.”⁸¹³

Because of the “ambiguity as to the literal creation event” in fundamental belief #6 it has been possible (within certain limits it must be acknowledged) for SDAs and SDA academics to subscribe to a form of theistic evolution and remain in SDA employ. The goal of rewording belief #6 is to remove this possibility, thereby excluding (and possibly firing) those who cannot subscribe to the proposed narrowing of the belief. In essence, then, since belief #6 “does not include a recent, 24-hour literal day Creation” the belief needs to be rewritten to include this. This will be a “five year process to change Fundamental Belief 6” and amounts to a process of making sacred. The change indicates a sacralising (in the sense that these ideas are incorporated in the fundamental beliefs) of at least two things: 1) the recent (around 6000 to 10 000 years ago) creation of the Earth,⁸¹⁴ and 2) that the days of Genesis 1 represent a week of seven literal, consecutive 24 hour days. In effect, what is unfolding is the making sacred of a certain hermeneutical method that is used to establish the Sabbath. Genesis 1-11 is seen to describe historical events in a literal manner. Thus, not only is Genesis 1-11 a sacred text (obviously as part of the Bible which forms the sacred text for the SDA Church), but the hermeneutical method that will draw the desired conclusions is also to be considered sacred.

⁸¹² South England Conference, “General Conference Report 2010.”

⁸¹³ Keith Lockhart, “Under Wilson, Church Begins the Process to Rewrite Creation Belief” (June 20, 2010), <http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2010/06/30/under-wilson-church-begins-process-rewrite-creation-belief> (accessed August 16, 2011).

⁸¹⁴ I use the word “earth” here but it is not exactly precise. Fundamental belief #6 as it currently stands states that the Lord made “the heaven and the earth” and the quotation marks are included in the belief indicating that this wording is taken from the Bible and that what “the heaven and the earth” constitute is open to interpretation. The point is that amongst traditional SDAs, some assert that God created the universe at this time, others that it was the Solar System and the universe was already in existence, while others state that it was just the Earth itself.

It is not as though the move to change fundamental belief #6 has been unopposed. Ben Clausen, a staff member (“pursuing research in the area of nuclear physics”) of the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI)—“an official institute of the Seventh-day Adventist Church”⁸¹⁵ having as a major component of its purview, the conflict “between the theory of evolution with its billions of years for the progressive development of life and the biblical account of the creation of life by God in six literal days a few thousand years ago”—stated reservations regarding the proposed changes. Clausen observed that “it is impossible [to teach] . . . scientifically rigorous exposure to [an] affirmation of our historic belief in a literal, recent six-day creation. . . . There are no available models.”⁸¹⁶

The principal reason that no leeway in interpretation can be permitted in either fundamental belief #6 or, indeed, Genesis 1 is because of the primacy of the Sabbath in SDA theology. “The fourth commandment would be meaningless were each day stretched into aeons.”⁸¹⁷

3.3.2. The Profane Other

The need to insist that Genesis 1 expresses literal days has resulted in much exegetical analysis amongst certain SDA scholars: “The Hebrew word translated day in Genesis 1 is *yom*. When *yom* is accompanied by a definite number, it always means a literal 24-hour day (e.g. Gen.7:11; Ex. 16:1).”⁸¹⁸

Gerhard Hasel in “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?” concludes quite a technical analysis of Genesis 1 “with 10 considerations that support the concept of a literal creation week with seven consecutive 24-hour days.”⁸¹⁹ Hasel’s argument is presented as a reaction to what he names “broad concordists” who in his view “attempt to interpret the ‘days’ of the Genesis creation account in nonliteral ways, in order to harmonize the long ages called for by the evolutionary theory

⁸¹⁵ Geoscience Research Institute, <http://www.grisda.org/research/> (accessed August 15, 2011).

⁸¹⁶ Lockhart.

⁸¹⁷ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 71.

⁸¹⁸ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 71.

⁸¹⁹ Gerhard Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ of Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?” in *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary*, ed. John Templeton Baldwin (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing, 2000), 40.

with the time implications of the biblical record of divine creation in Genesis 1,⁸²⁰ thereby advocating “progressive creationism.”⁸²¹ Hasel insists “that Genesis 1 is a factual account of the origin of the livable world. The biblical record is accurate, authentic and historical.”⁸²² There are two different claims that Hasel makes with regard to the nature of Genesis 1. The first is that it should be read literally, while the second claims that it is a historical record. In order to bolster these claims, Hasel strives to debunk any alternative “literary genre categories.” In this regard, Hasel gives the following précis of some “major representative examples.”

Karl Barth, the father of neo-orthodox theology, regards Genesis 1, 2 as “saga” and of course, nonhistorical. S. H. Hooke, the leader of the myth-and-ritual school, says that the Genesis creation account is a “cultic liturgy.” Gordon Wenham, a neo-evangelical scholar, believes it to be a “hymn.” Walter Brueggemann, a liberal concordist, suggests that it is a “poem.” Claus Westermann, a form critic, calls it a “narrative.” Gerhard von Rad, a tradition critic, designates it as “doctrine.” Others hold that it is a “myth,” “parable,” “story,” “theology,” “allegory,” etc.⁸²³

Hasel uses a series of (apparently) prejudicial labels—neo-orthodox, myth-and-ritual school, neo-evangelical, liberal concordist and tradition critic—in order, it seems, to dismiss each of these positions, since none are examined with regard to their actual content. This diversity of views, Hasel concludes, highlight that “there is no consensus on the literary nature of Genesis 1” which therefore should make “the careful interpreter” cautious to “avoid jumping on the bandwagon of literary genre identification in an attempt to redefine the literal intent of Genesis 1.”⁸²⁴ It should be noted that while Hasel claims that there is “no consensus,” these different approaches to Genesis 1 are not necessarily mutually exclusive as Hasel seems to imply. Furthermore, it is quite evident that distinctions between interpretations rest not so much on each particular analysis of Genesis 1 as the theological reasoning that undergirds them. If one takes several advocates from differing theological schools of thought it would be somewhat surprising if they did find consensus. There is also a barely veiled arrogance in Hasel’s inference that all who engage in this type of hermeneutical analysis are “not careful interpreters.” More than this, though, it is important not to miss

⁸²⁰ Hasel, 43.

⁸²¹ Hasel, 45.

⁸²² Hasel, 45.

⁸²³ Hasel, 50.

⁸²⁴ Hasel, 50.

Hasel's principal point which admits that "interpreters following the 'literary genre' . . . interpret the 'days' of creation in a literal and grammatical way."⁸²⁵ The problem is not that they don't read the text *literally*, but rather that they reject the texts historicity:

The "literary genre" approach restricts the meaning of Genesis 1 to a thought form that does not demand a factual, historical reading of what took place . . . [It] thus prevents [Genesis] from informing modern readers on how, in what manner, and in what time God created the world. Instead, it simply wishes to affirm minimalistically that God is Creator. And that affirmation is meant to be a theological, non-scientific statement, with no impact on how the world and universe came into being and developed subsequently.⁸²⁶

Hasel then spends the bulk of his article arguing that the Hebrew word for "day"—*yom*—in the context of Genesis 1 "can mean only a literal 'day' of 24 hours."⁸²⁷ His arguments revolve around a grammatical analysis of the manner in which the word appears in Genesis 1 and its implied meaning based on similar usages in the remainder of the Bible. The problem that Hasel faces is that establishing that Genesis 1 refers to literal 24 hour days does not establish its historicity. Hasel sets up his essay as an argument against what has been termed the *day-age theory* which attempts to correlate "the 'creation days' with geological epochs."⁸²⁸ But this is scarcely a view that is particularly prevalent and in itself is little more than a variation on biblical literalism. Since in the mind of God "a thousand years is like a day" (Psalm 90:4 cf. 2 Peter 3:8), a "day" from a biblical perspective can be interpreted as an indefinable period of time. But Hasel is concerned to arrive at a single conclusion, which is that all other interpretations are invalid and for this reason spends a couple of pages discrediting the validity of paralleling the "days" in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 with the "days" in Genesis 1.⁸²⁹ Nevertheless, Hasel is rigorous in his analysis and his contribution to the discourse revolving around the interpretation of Genesis 1 (particularly in an SDA context) is one that should not be summarily dismissed.

Hasel is just one example of SDA apologetics on this issue. *Questions on Doctrine*, for example, as early as 1957, stated: "All Seventh-day Adventists, as creationists, believe in the Genesis record of a fiat creation (Gen. 1:1 to 2:2) with the seventh day as God's recorded

⁸²⁵ Hasel, 50.

⁸²⁶ Hasel, 50-51.

⁸²⁷ Hasel, 57.

⁸²⁸ Joseph L. Spradley, *Visions that Shaped the Universe: A History of Scientific Ideas about the Universe* (Dubuque: WCB Publishers, 1995), 4.

⁸²⁹ Hasel, 45-47.

and attested rest day, and the Sabbath given as the perpetual memorial of that creation.”⁸³⁰

There is a perceived attack on this belief that stems from the theory of evolution rather than theological or exegetical reasoning. So even though SDA apologists, such as Hasel, will attack all other interpretations of Genesis 1, these “other” interpretations are, in general, considered to be compromises to the might of the scientific community.

Fernando Canale, for example, argues that in order for a Christian to believe in both God and evolution, it is necessary to postulate that God exists outside of time (in order to rid the creation narrative of meaning literal days since time is inconsequential to a timeless god). Canale argues that while Christians, in general, may feel comfortable doing this, SDAs do not have this liberty. This is because the entire SDA belief system is founded on the notion of a historical God. It is not merely the creation story and the Sabbath that is affected by this, but also other beliefs. Canale explicitly mentions the Great Controversy—fundamental belief #8—but it is relatively simple to follow his logic in this regard as other distinctives of Adventism clearly fall into this category, although it is not necessary to unpack these here. For Canale, any sort of compromise in the direction of evolutionary theory threatens the very existence of the SDA Church:

Harmonizing Scripture to evolution, then, requires the harmonization of the Adventist theological method to the always-changing dictates of human science and tradition. In turn, methodological changes will require a reformulation of the entire corpus of Adventist doctrine and, eventually, the reformulation of all 27 fundamental beliefs [this work was published in 2005, the same year that a 28th fundamental belief was added]. Before seeking harmonization between the creation and evolution metanarratives, then, Adventists should seriously think whether they are willing to give up the very reason for their existence as a church.⁸³¹

To bolster his argument, Canale adds an endnote referencing Ellen White, who is accorded prophetic status in the SDA Church:

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis for all reforms. The opinion of learned men [*sic*], the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before

⁸³⁰ *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 158.

⁸³¹ Fernando Canale, *Creation, Evolution and Theology: The Role of Method in Theological Accommodation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Lithotec, 2005), 141.

accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.⁸³²

With this understanding, the disagreement that many SDA creationists have with the theory of evolution is not something that is open to any debate or negotiation; it is raised to the level of a component of the conflict between Christ and Satan (fundamental belief #8 *The Great Controversy*). Norman Gulley, a highly regarded SDA academic, states categorically: “Seventh-day Adventists believe that *Satan lies behind the various forms of evolutionary theory* [emphasis added] locked in the naturalistic worldview.”⁸³³ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* connects belief in the theory of evolution to the fall of humanity in Genesis 3:

Ever since Creation Satan has confused many by weakening confidence in the scriptural accounts of the origins of the human race and man’s [*sic*] fall. One could call evolution the ‘natural’ view of humanity, a view based on the assumptions that life began by chance and that humans, through a long evolutionary process, have emerged from the lower forms of life.⁸³⁴

The antagonism between SDA theology and modern science is even more explicitly formulated in apocalyptic terms. At the heart of SDA proclamations of the Gospel is fundamental belief #13 “The Remnant and its Mission:”

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. *This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14* [emphasis added]; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.⁸³⁵

Although, somewhat concealed in the midst of the 28 fundamental beliefs, “the three angels’ messages” are considered a crucial distinctive component of the SDA mission. This is explicitly stated on the official SDA website: “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church . . . is to proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three

⁸³² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), 595, quoted in Canale, *Creation*, 144n13.

⁸³³ Norman Gulley, *Christ is Coming: A Christ-centered Approach to Last-Day Events* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing, 1998), 406.

⁸³⁴ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 91.

⁸³⁵ *Church Manual*, 13.

Angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12.”⁸³⁶ It is via the message of the first of these three angels (Revelation 14:7), that the creation/evolution conflict becomes a part of SDA apocalypticism. John T. Baldwin notes that the Sabbath commandment as outlined in Exodus 20:8-11 references the creation narrative in Genesis 1 in the same manner as Revelation 14:7. The following table is Baldwin's:⁸³⁷

Diagram showing how Revelation 14:7 implies a six-day creation cosmogony/worldview.	
Exodus 20:11 (Old Testament)	Revelation 14:7 (New Testament)
“For <i>in six days</i> the Lord (1) made the (2) heavens and the (3) earth, the (4) seas and all that is in them.”	“Worship him who [<i>in six days</i>] (1) made the (2) heavens and the (3) earth and (4) sea and springs of waters.”

For Baldwin, the indicated “four verbal parallels” clearly verify that although “in six days” is not present in Revelation 14:7, it is implied: “The above exegetical analyses indicate that Revelation 14:7 is a divinely intended first-century confirmation of the six-day creation worldview.”⁸³⁸ This, then, as previously noted, locates the issue of creation in the “apocalyptic end-time sweep of Revelation 12-14.”⁸³⁹ This, for Baldwin, indicates that evolutionary theory is to be equated with “the dragon” (Revelation 12:9) and “the two beasts of chapter 13” who seek “to enforce a global system of false worship.”⁸⁴⁰ The three angels, however, “passionately summon everyone to worship the only true God. This indicates the end-time relevance of the first message of Revelation 14.”⁸⁴¹

Baldwin takes his point even further to the issue of hermeneutics claiming that an “implication of the cosmology of verse 7 is its capacity to illustrate how God desires that we interpret the Bible. The passage encourages us to return to a distinctive biblical hermeneutic.”

⁸³⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Mission and Service,” <http://www.adventist.org/mission-and-service/index.html> (accessed September 6, 2011).

⁸³⁷ John T. Baldwin, “Revelation 14:7: An Angel’s Worldview,” in *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing, 2000), 21.

⁸³⁸ Baldwin, 21.

⁸³⁹ Baldwin, 22.

⁸⁴⁰ Baldwin, 22.

⁸⁴¹ Baldwin, 22.

Baldwin suggests that Revelation 14:7 “reminds us that we need to interpret the Bible literally and historically when called for by the text.”⁸⁴²

In addition, because it was Jesus who appeared in the visions (Rev. 1:1, 10, 12, 17, 18), it means that in Revelation 14:7 none other than the resurrected Lord Himself interprets Genesis 1 literally, thus illustrating Christ’s preferred post-Resurrection method of Bible hermeneutics. He offers it as a model for us today. We too would do well to understand the Bible literally when common sense tells that is what a passage intends, just as Jesus does here. Because the book of Revelation speaks to us in the last days and uses this type of hermeneutics, it strongly suggests that it is one divinely intended for the end-time.⁸⁴³

This appeal for literal and historical interpretations as the hermeneutic preferred by Jesus on the basis of apocalyptic literature (which even SDAs admit is largely a book of symbols requiring interpretation)⁸⁴⁴ and “common sense” demonstrates how fundamentally incompatible *any other* hermeneutic is perceived to be by this strand of SDA thought. Not only is the specific literal and historical interpretation of Genesis 1 (six consecutive 24-hour days) sacred, but also the hermeneutic that arrives at this conclusion is sacred—it is the hermeneutic employed by Jesus. Added to this is the fact that *all other* interpretations of Genesis 1 along with their associated hermeneutics are the work of Satan. Every other is profane. The logic of Baldwin’s arguments may be uniquely his, but his conclusions are nevertheless consistent with mainstream SDA apocalypticism. In its commentary on Revelation 14:7, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* notes:

The appeal to worship God as Creator has become especially timely in the years following the initial preaching of the first angel’s message, because of the rapid spread of evolution. Furthermore, the call to worship the God of heaven as Creator of all things implies that due heed be given to the sign of God’s creative works—the Sabbath of the Lord (see on Ex. 20:8-11). If the Sabbath had been kept as God intended, it would have served as a great safeguard against infidelity and evolution.⁸⁴⁵

It is quite clear, then, that any interpretation of Genesis 1 must employ this “sacred” hermeneutic. It is absolutely pointless to argue that any other hermeneutic is a possibility,

⁸⁴² Baldwin, 29.

⁸⁴³ Baldwin, 29-30. Baldwin’s somewhat intriguing interpretive conclusions fail to align with the play associated with *différance* not because their validity is in question, but because his arguments are governed by an exclusive centre that has the intent of preserving its exclusivity. The problem is logocentrism, not his interpretation of the text.

⁸⁴⁴ For example, in commenting on the symbolic nature of the book of Revelation, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* concedes that while major themes can be identified, “all this is portrayed in highly symbolic language, which may not always admit of exact interpretations.” Nichol, 7:724.

⁸⁴⁵ Nichol, 1:828.

because *all other hermeneutics are profane, that is, of the devil*. Coupled to this, the essence of the interpretation that needs to be addressed is the notion of six consecutive 24-hour days.

The parameters must be narrowed even further. Not only am I operating within a historical and literal hermeneutical framework, I am also provided with the necessary interpretation within the framework, namely, that the days of Genesis 1 are consecutive 24-hour days. It is *only* within a discourse that maintains these two fundamentals—the hermeneutic and the resultant interpretation—as *a priori* principles that the conversation can continue. To step anywhere else is to become the profane other.

If one insists that the week of Genesis 1 is identical (that is literally and historically) to a week that one experiences today, and is not merely *analogous* to a week of seven days, then one is immediately confronted with a paradox. Since the very notion of a day requires that the earth rotates on its axis as it revolves around the sun, it must immediately be admitted that the first “day” that has the possibility of being literally and historically identical to the manner in which a current day is measured and experienced, is the fifth day of Genesis 1. This is simply because the sun was created on the fourth day:

And God said, “Let there be light in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. [God] also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.⁸⁴⁶

It should be noted, that no SDA interpreter of any significance claims that these “two great lights” do not refer to the sun and the moon. If one compares the above with the description of the first day, both a literal *and* a historical interpretation are questionable: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and [God] separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day’, and the darkness [God] called ‘night’. And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.”⁸⁴⁷ Since there is no sun on the first day, the designation of “evening and morning” to this day is something of a curiosity. What does it mean? It is *not* a literal and historical record of events as they occurred on earth. This is because a literal reading of the text precludes this possibility. One *could* argue that the first day is *analogous* to a day as we experience it, but our *sacred hermeneutic* does not allow us that leeway, as much as we may now wish to break

⁸⁴⁶ Gen. 1:14-19 (NIV).

⁸⁴⁷ Gen. 1:3-5 (NIV).

faith with what has been named sacred. The hermeneutic and the interpretation (literal and historical) do not allow for the notion of “analogous.” It tells us that there actually was evening and morning (literally) and that this marked the passage of the first (historical) day. But Genesis 1:14 points out that the great lights which “*mark* [emphasis added] seasons and days and years” only appeared on the fourth day. Quite clearly, if one is to read Genesis 1 literally and historically, there was *not* evening and morning (on earth) for the first three days of creation week, when quite clearly the text says that there was. Also, it is only on earth that days are 24 hours in length (approximately). One may wish to argue that God acted as a “metaphorical light-bulb”⁸⁴⁸ hovering over the earth, thereby creating the illusion of evening and morning, but to descend into such whimsical speculation is scarcely a compelling basis for doctrinal proclamations.

The creation week of Genesis 1 is without precedent, but the notion that it sets the precedent for the nature of all ensuing weeks introduces a paradox with no obvious resolution in a literal/historical hermeneutical framework. In this regard, I am referring purely to its chronology—by which, in part at least, is what is meant by its historicity. The claim is that the length of time of creation week is literally the same length of time for every week since, from Sabbath to Sabbath. The reason that we can have certainty that our weeks *are* the same length as creation week is that each day is marked out via the setting and rising sun, evening and morning. But the dilemma is that the only week that does not conform to this marking of time is the week that sets that precedent. Each day of creation week *was not* marked by a setting and rising sun, evening and morning. Creation week is unique, a singular exception, *in the manner that its chronology is measured*. It is true that each day, from the first day to the sixth, is accompanied by the defining phrase: “And there was evening and there was morning . . .” (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). It is reasonable to presume a consistent meaning for each of these verses. So the designation “there was evening and there was morning” has the same meaning whether, for example, it is applied to the first day (where there was no sun) or the sixth day (by which stage the sun had been created). But since this description clearly cannot *literally* apply to the sun for the first day (although it could be meant *analogously*), then this meaning must equally apply to the sixth day (it cannot be

⁸⁴⁸ Davidson suggests this as one feasible explanation: “One possibility is that God’s presence was the source of light on the first day of Creation.” Davidson also proposes an alternative: “A second option suggests that the sun was created before the fourth day, but became visible on that day (perhaps as a vapor cover was removed). This would explain the evening/morning cycle before day four.” Davidson, 37. These suggestions of Davidson are heartening, not because they are compelling (and I think Davidson would acknowledge this), but because they present a genuine playfulness. They are not exegetical claims; rather they are creative insertions that are open to further discussion.

meant *literally*—even though the sun had been created—since its meaning is already established). The point is an obvious one, in terms of the *timing* of creation week, if we are to read it literally and historically, the only thing we can say for certain is that it is unlike the *timing* of all subsequent weeks.

If certain SDAs wish to insist that what is *meant* by “evening and morning” is the same as a day that may be said to exist after the fourth day, then a crack appears in the *sacred* literal and historical hermeneutic that has been championed as inviolable. The profane other, in the guise of analogy, steps through the crack to solve the self-generated hermeneutical conundrum. If one is to absolutely *insist* that the only legitimate hermeneutic for reading Genesis 1 is literal and historical, and thereby *exclude* all other interpretations, something almost incongruous happens. The very hermeneutic that is sacralised as the one-and-only, excludes not only *all other* interpretations, it excludes itself. *There is no space; there is no khôra for any interpretation*; not even the interpretation that searches for “literal-historical-six-24-hour-consecutive-days.”

What is meant by this? *Khôra*, as described by Derrida, admits all interpretations and all hermeneutics, one might say, indiscriminately. This does not speak to the validity of these interpretations; it merely admits them into the discourse. A particular interpretation may be dismissed and rejected as incoherent, illogical, and fanciful, but this very dismissal and rejection exists as part of the discourse only in tandem with that which it strives to negate. All of this is inscribed on *khôra*. The moment a hermeneutic or interpretation is sacralised as the only legitimate one; it is simultaneously trying to step outside of *khôra*, to escape its clutches as it were. But this is impossible. This type of thinking could be described as, possibly, hiding in one of the folds of *khôra*,⁸⁴⁹ concealing itself in the darkness from the remainder of the discourse. But in order to make itself understood to itself, whether knowingly or unknowingly, it leans on other parts of the discourse. This is the crack through which “analogy” shines in order to enable the literal and historical reading of Genesis 1 to find coherence with itself. But at the same time it shatters it, because it has admitted the profane other. This other (analogy) is the very thing that the literal and historical hermeneutic wished

⁸⁴⁹ Caputo, writing about *khôra*, refers to the “folds” in “any text, ancient or modern, sacred or profane, which would always be structured, ‘constructed’ of layer upon layer, fold upon fold, ply upon ply, so that to read a ‘text’ is always to un-fold, de-construct, what is going on.” Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 88. To reduce a text to a single way of understanding (in Caputo’s context “the philosophy of Plato”), “is to flatten out and smooth over all the folds and plies of the text . . . to brush off this play of reflections as incidental, marginal, accidental asides and indulge in still another fiction called ‘the philosophy of Plato.’” Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 90.

to exclude and with it come all of its companions: myth, saga, allegory, metaphor, allusion, typology and, it must be said, modern science.

But while it is impossible to escape *khôra*, there is another step that can be taken. On closer examination the interpretation or possibly the intra-lingual translation of the “days” of Genesis 1 into literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days could be likened to Derrida’s detour: *pas de sens*. On the one hand, in and of itself, the statement “six literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days” in the context of Genesis 1 is, according to its self-definition, of (*de*) no (*pas*) meaning (*sens*). But on the other hand, if it is allowed to step beyond itself towards another—any other—it is taking a step (*pas*) of (*de*) meaning (*sens*). The step away is like a dance step that in the moment forgets itself as it glimpses the other. Once glimpsed there is no going back. This is why the step that marks the centre is resolute and angry and fearful. It cannot even acknowledge the other, let alone consider its validity. There is no meaning, only the repetitive phrase at the centre which must be held at any cost—sacrificing the other is a small price to pay.

3.3.3. Playing with Science

As I have continually reiterated, the SDA interpretation of Genesis 1 as literal and historical is really a backlash to the perceived threat of the theory of evolution that serves to undermine not only the short chronology of the earth but also the idea of a weeklong creation event. As Canale says:

During the Faith and Science International Conference no argument or evidence has been presented that may intellectually compel the Church to adopt the deep time/evolutionary version of the history of life on our planet. Consequently, Adventists need to reaffirm the fact that a theological understanding of Genesis 1 as describing the literal-historical-six-24-hour-consecutive-days period through which God created our planet is essential to the theological thinking of Scripture, and therefore, to the harmonious system of truth that gave rise to Adventism and its global mission.⁸⁵⁰

For Canale, the theological consequences of accepting “the deep time/evolutionary version of the history of life on our planet” are so dire as to undermine the very basis for the existence of the SDA Church.⁸⁵¹ I do not concur with Canale’s fears, since, as I have previously indicated, there is a heterogeneity that has pervaded Adventism from its earliest years and still persists to the present day. Nevertheless, Canale basically affirms something that is

⁸⁵⁰ Canale, *Creation*, 156.

⁸⁵¹ Canale, *Creation*, 141.

relatively obvious when worldviews collide: our scientific worldview affects our theological worldview. In the case of “deep time/evolutionary” science the theological effects are not insignificant.

But one must also acknowledge that if scientific formulations and conclusions affect theology, then our theological pronouncements have scientific repercussions. There is, perhaps, an inevitable “scientific” conclusion that must be drawn from the SDA affirmation “that the seven days of creation were literal 24 hour days forming a literal week”⁸⁵² and its connection via Exodus 20 to the Sabbath commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. . . . For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”⁸⁵³

Each week is seen not only as a seven day period (one of the seven days being a rest day), but also a week that operates in parallel with creation week. This is evident when one considers that the very existence of the SDA Church depends to a relatively significant extent on the fact that Sunday, although a seventh day of sorts is not the legitimate seventh day. This can be expressed in the following table:

<i>Creation Week</i>	1 st Day	2 nd Day	3 rd Day	4 th Day	5 th Day	6 th Day	7th Day (God’s Rests)
<i>SDA Week</i>	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sabbath (Rest)
<i>Most of Christendom</i>	Sunday (Rest) ⁸⁵⁴	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

The illegitimacy of Sunday as the day of rest stems from the fact that it does not parallel the seventh day of creation week. In responding to the suggestion that one day in seven is the spirit of the commandment (“six-and-one days”) the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* responded:

⁸⁵² General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “Statement on Creation: The Bible’s Worldview” (June 23, 2010), <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/bible-worldview.html> (accessed September 7, 2011).

⁸⁵³ Ex. 20:8, 11 (NIV).

⁸⁵⁴ I have used the term “rest” as a means to distinguish the days not as a theological statement.

We dissent from the change of the original wording—the ‘six days’ and the ‘seventh day,’ of the fourth commandment of Exodus 20—to the unbiblical expression ‘six-and-one days,’ or a mere proportion of time for to us such a change of phrasing involve a definite change of intent to which we cannot agree.⁸⁵⁵

The objection to Sunday as an alternative to Sabbath (Saturday) has found its way into SDA eschatology. Although this eschatology is not uniformly accepted by all SDAs, it is certainly a dominant view. It revolves around the belief that at some point in the future Sunday observance will be “enforced by law” (by Roman Catholicism either directly or indirectly), at which point Sunday will become “the mark of the beast” of Revelation 13:

But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God. . . . As men [*sic*] then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of [God’s] authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome—“the mark of the beast.”⁸⁵⁶

This theological reasoning presents the ultimate polarisation between Sabbath and Sunday observance. A time will come when all those who observe Sunday as opposed to Sabbath will, according to this apocalyptic vision, be, in effect, Satan worshipers. The distinction between Sabbath and Sunday could not be more absolute.

My concern, though, is the precise delineation of days and hours in this rejection of Sunday as a legitimate rest day. Since creation week represents, and I use Canale’s wording, “literal-historical-six-24-hour-consecutive-days,” there is a question that requires an answer so that one can anchor the starting point of the 24 hour period represented by the first day: Where was God standing when God created? Of course, I could reiterate that there was no sun on the first day, but the point I would like to outline is somewhat different. It is quite obvious that every day on the planet does not fall at the same instant owing to the rather obvious fact that the earth is spherical. SDAs are particularly aware of this because Sabbath is kept globally from sunset to sunset. This means that SDAs worldwide are all keeping Sabbath *at different times*. An SDA in Cape Town will be keeping Sabbath while Sabbath for an SDA in San Francisco will only begin around nine hours later. But this cannot be, because each literal 24 hour week *must* be paralleled precisely with the precedent week of creation. But the marking of time is given by the sun, which owing to a spherical revolving earth, does not

⁸⁵⁵ *Questions on Doctrine*, 157.

⁸⁵⁶ White, *Great Controversy*, 449.

allow for a precise parallel, at least not from sunset to sunset. The commandment is *literally* impossible to obey, *unless the earth is flat!* “God has given no commandments which cannot be obeyed by all.”⁸⁵⁷ This is not intended to be a facetious point.

Since the days ratchet around one another, there is an imaginary line drawn upon the globe called the International Date Line (IDL). This line, running longitudinally through the Pacific Ocean designates the point at which each calendar day “begins.” Now although the line is a human construct, it is nevertheless instructive with regard to SDA Sabbath observance. Since Sunday observance is anathema in SDA circles, but nevertheless is alongside the Sabbath in that it occurs 24 hours later, an interesting dilemma occurs at the IDL.

The previous table can be reconstituted (below). One needs to realise what this actually means in practice for the notion of the mark of the beast (acceptance of Sunday worship once it is enforced by law). A person who observes Sunday rest immediately to the west of the IDL will receive the mark of the beast, while observing exactly the same day (the same 24 hour period of time) as a Sabbath keeper to the east of the IDL. This is because the 24 hours on the west of the line named Sunday is the same as the 24 hours on the east of the line named Saturday. This is the extreme instance of the simple fact that although there is a move in the SDA Church to align the creation week of Genesis 1 with “literal-historical-six-24-hour-consecutive-days” in order to then align this week with every subsequent week, it is impossible to actually accomplish this alignment in practice (see table below).

<i>Creation Week</i>	1 st Day	2 nd Day	3 rd Day	4 th Day	5 th Day	6 th Day	7 th Day (God’s Rests)
<i>SDA Week (West of IDL)</i>	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sabbath (Rest)
<i>Most of Christendom (West of IDL)</i>	Sunday (Rest)	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<i>SDA Week (East of IDL)</i>	Sabbath (Rest)	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

⁸⁵⁷ Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages: The Conflict of the Ages Illustrated in the Life of Christ* (Phoenix: Inspiration Books, 1985), 170.

The commandment to keep Sabbath as it was experienced by Israel in the Old Testament faced no such inconsistencies. Quite obviously, the Sabbath always fell at (roughly) the same time for the whole people of Israel. Even so, the writer of Genesis 1 did not feel the need to incorporate the notion of “literal-historical-six-24-hour-consecutive days.” Of course, this fundamentalist Adventism could subscribe to a flat earth and argue that science has not yet caught up with the Bible (and, presumably, that Sabbath to the east of the IDL has not yet caught up with Sabbath to the west of the IDL)—so much differing and so much deferring. I am, of course, *playing* and *playing* does require a sense of humour and the ability to laugh. I hope it will not be deferred for too long.

University of Cape Town

Conclusion

Nothing is sacred to Derrida. One could phrase this differently by a simple substitution. *Khôra* (is) sacred to Derrida, which simply means that *khôra* is inviolate. There is no means by which *khôra* can be reached. It precedes all the dichotomies that provide the numerous traditional religious partners associated with the sacred: profane, unclean, common, unholy, demonic and so forth. These ideas seek to exclude others, but they cannot exclude *khôra* because *khôra* is the condition for their existence. *Khôra* is of a different order and remains untouched, no matter how virulent the defamation. But *khôra* also provides space for all others. It is itself wholly other, totally unlike everything inscribed on it, but there is no exclusion with *khôra*. This means that to sacralise *khôra* is to sacralise everything. *Khôra* is sacred, and everything is sacred to *khôra*. There is no outside, no place of rejection. More than this, all that is inscribed on *khôra* is accompanied. It is not alone, but is inscribed with *différance*. *Khôra* and *différance* are partners, which is a reason why it can be said of *différance* that “*khôra* is its surname.” The whole point of the other is that we are not alone, that we don’t want to be alone, that there is another, and this other is accepted.

And whenever another, even a *tout autre*, is encountered there is an option. We can either *play* with the other, or we can exclude the other. *Différance* is this play. Radical evil is this exclusion, right here at the root, at the origin, at the beginning. Exclusion is out of step with *khôra* and out of step with *différance*. The reason that Derrida takes issue with logocentrism, the metaphysics of presence, ontotheologies, religion and even the name “God” is because they are not merely ideas that make no difference. They serve to isolate and confine, to identify and define, and in this very endeavour deny the other.

Creation narratives—the *Timaeus* and Genesis 1—are driven by play, by the creative spirit that introduces something other, something different. This is why an exclusive definition inscribed at the centre of creation is in disharmony with creation. Whether one wishes to credit the demiurge or God with the creative power, it is first and foremost creative. That the earth was formless and void prior to creation and that this abyss can be likened to *khôra* is not merely a hermeneutical game. It is acknowledging that there actually was a creation event, that something wholly other, something unique was created. This was not merely a forming and filling of pre-existent matter that could be accomplished by a slightly imaginative factory worker with the right implements. To insist that the fundamental point of departure, the inviolable truth, the sacred centre of Genesis 1 is that it consisted of six literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days is to reduce the creation of everything to a week’s work

at a manufacturing plant, a factory, after which the worker/s are glad for the arrival of the weekend—the Sabbath—so that they can rest.

The meaning of creation is first and foremost *play*. Its primary aspect is creativity and *not* the drudgery associated with work. Creative work *is* play. The centre of Genesis 1 is not six literal, historical, consecutive 24 hour days. This logocentrism *is* down a detour somewhere, let us not forget that. *Khôra* retains the inscription and logocentrism *is* down a similar detour not very far away, but every inscription that strives to establish its exclusivity is only concealing itself from every other, rejecting the other, profaning the other, condemning the other, denying the other.

Still, this dissertation is a hermeneutical exercise of sorts. But hermeneutics is not a trivial matter, particularly when one is tying one's conclusions to religious beliefs that serve to establish the identity of a community. Unfortunately, it is not possible to verify a hermeneutical method that has its origins in something pre-originary, outside of the logic of language, beyond the *logos*. It either resonates with one or it does not—there is no body of empirical data, no metaphysical stream of signifiers that can be presented as evidence for its supreme validity. There are, however, conclusions or implications of employing what I playfully call “a structural hermeneutic of the *triton genos*.” These conclusions include:

1. The other is not only acknowledged, but is valued because of the other's status as other.

2. Play is at the centre of this hermeneutic which means that it is not rigid and governed by strict inviolable rules. The rules of the game are changeable and substitutable. I have used *différance*, detours and *khôra* by name (appellation), but there are others. There are always others—other centres around which this play happens. Derrida has other ideas that could serve as substitutions: the supplement, deconstruction, the trace, justice, faith, inventions and so on. But while Derrida is a font of ideas when it comes to *différance*, one should recall that *différance* is at play in language and to just speak Derrida's name in response to *différance* and inscriptions on *khôra* is unnecessarily limiting. There are others.

3. No matter how restrictive and exclusive a particular interpretation of a text may appear, the play of *différance* remains. There is a *triton genos*. This *triton genos* is not really a *third*, as we might count to three. There is nothing magical about the number three, as though there is something wrong with two or one or, even, four. The *third* route, the *third* detour, the *third* step, the *third* genus are just *other* ways and, they don't even resemble the two that came before (if, indeed, there were two). In the same way that play defies structure,

detours miss the highway and *différance* is not a neologism, the *triton genos* is of a completely different order—not a building, not a path, not a word or a concept—*tout autre*.

4. Although a structural hermeneutic of the *triton genos* values deconstruction and negative theology, it does not have to follow the path of destruction and reconstruction or the *via negativa*. There is another road—an affirming detour—that discovers the other via a determined affirmation of the same. It is the same, but only more so. While the days of Genesis 1, identified as six literal, historical, consecutive 24-hour days imply exclusion, to argue about their validity is to descend into a debate which can only be an either/or. A structural hermeneutic of the *triton genos* is not concerned to find a *better* interpretation or the *best* interpretation, it serves to establish another interpretation by allowing the play of *différance* to happen.⁸⁵⁸ This is accomplished not by denying the validity of the central motif of six literal days, but by affirming it.

5. In order to arrive at coherent conclusions and understandable interpretations, this hermeneutic does operate with a centre in place. However, this centre is not a *logos* that precedes the letter, because that which precedes the letter is itself centred on *différance* which is neither a word nor a concept. It, hence, cannot be logocentric, since the centre does not properly belong to language. It is not a signifier that indicates a signified. It decentres and points to the other, away from itself. In this way it invites the other to be the centre which itself leads to further substitutions. The final word is never spoken or written. It is always to come. There is always a deferral. But this deferral does not mean there is no validity or point of reference. Each substitution indicates another. Each other is a valid and valued inscription on *khôra*. The reason that the play continues is for the sake of the other.

⁸⁵⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote in *Truth and Method*: “Understanding is not, in fact, superior understanding, neither in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas, nor in the sense of fundamental superiority that the conscious has over the unconscious nature of creation. It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garret Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, Continuum, 1975), 264.

Appendix A: The *Triton Genos* in the Structure

First Level headings	Second Level headings	Third Level headings
1. Searching for the Sacred in Derrida	1.1. Religion and the Sacred	1.1.1. Religion
		1.1.2. Negative Theology
		1.1.3. The Sacred
	1.2. The Other	
	1.3. Sacred Centres	1.3.1. Logocentrism
		1.3.2. Detours
		1.3.3. Messianism
2. <i>Khôra</i>		
3. SDA Uses of the Creation Narrative	3.1. A Hermeneutical Framework	3.1.1. Centring the Discourse
		3.1.2. <i>Différance</i>
		3.1.3. Fundamentals
	3.2. Without Form and Void	
	3.3. Playing with Genesis 1	3.3.1. SDA Fundamental Belief #6
		3.3.2. The Profane Other
		3.3.3. Playing with Science

The above table indicates how the structure of this thesis is divided into triplets for each level of headings. At the centre of each triplet is a focal point, which is a decentring idea. There is a single triplet of “first level headings” with “*Khôra*” at the centre. There are two triplets of “second level headings” with “the other” and “without form and void” as respective centres. There are four triplets of “third level headings” with “negative theology,” “detours,” “*différance*” and “the profane other” as centres. Notice that each centre is not subdivided or reduced into further subsections. This is because to do so would defeat the point of the structure. Since each “centre” is intended to decentre, any further subsections could only serve to define and centre.

The structure explains the heart of the dissertation. The focal point (*triton genos*) of the dissertation (derived from first level headings) is *khôra*. One can deduce further centres as they relate to each heading. For example, at the centre of “1. Searching for the Sacred in Derrida” is “1.2. The Other.” For clarity, each *triton genos* in relation to the structure is outlined in the following table (overleaf), although these should already be evident from the above table:

	<i>Triton Genos</i>
The Whole Dissertation	2. <i>Khôra</i>
1. Searching for the Sacred in Derrida	1.2. The Other
1.1. Religion and the Sacred	1.1.2. Negative Theology
1.3. Sacred Centres	1.3.2. Detours
3. SDA Uses of the Creation Narrative	3.2. Without Form and Void
3.1. Hermeneutical Framework	3.1.2. <i>Différance</i>
3.3. Playing with Genesis 1	3.3.2. The Profane Other

Beyond this it should be evident that the third section of the dissertation (SDA Uses of the Creation Narrative) has been structured in a manner that is analogous to the structure of the entire dissertation. Most obviously this is evident in “without form and void” (the centre of chapter 3) taken from Genesis 1:2 which can be paralleled with *khôra* (the centre of the dissertation) in the *Timaeus*.

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University of Cape Town